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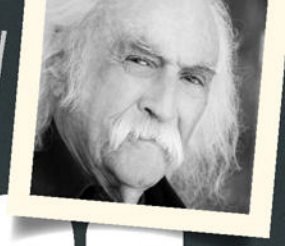

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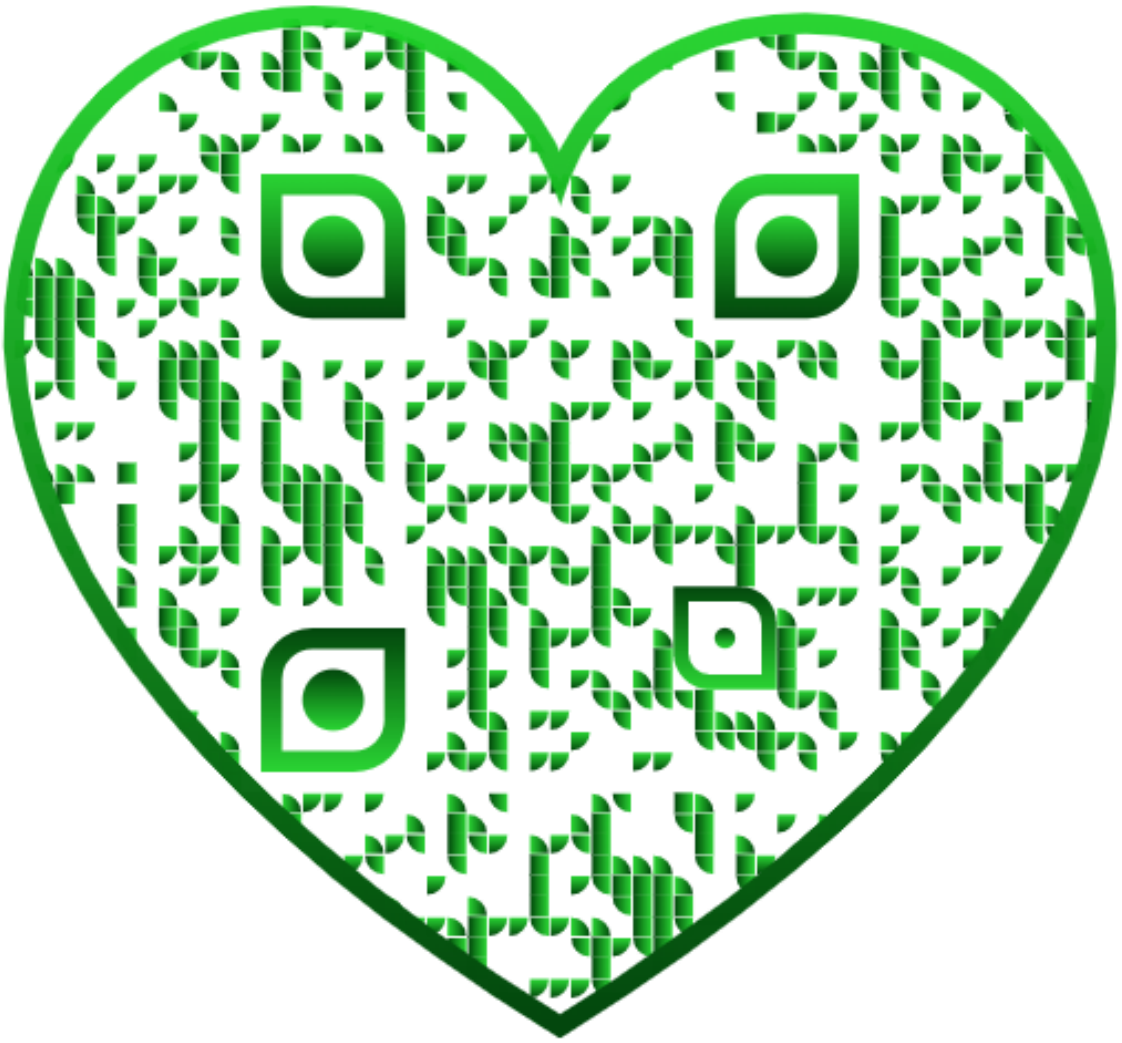

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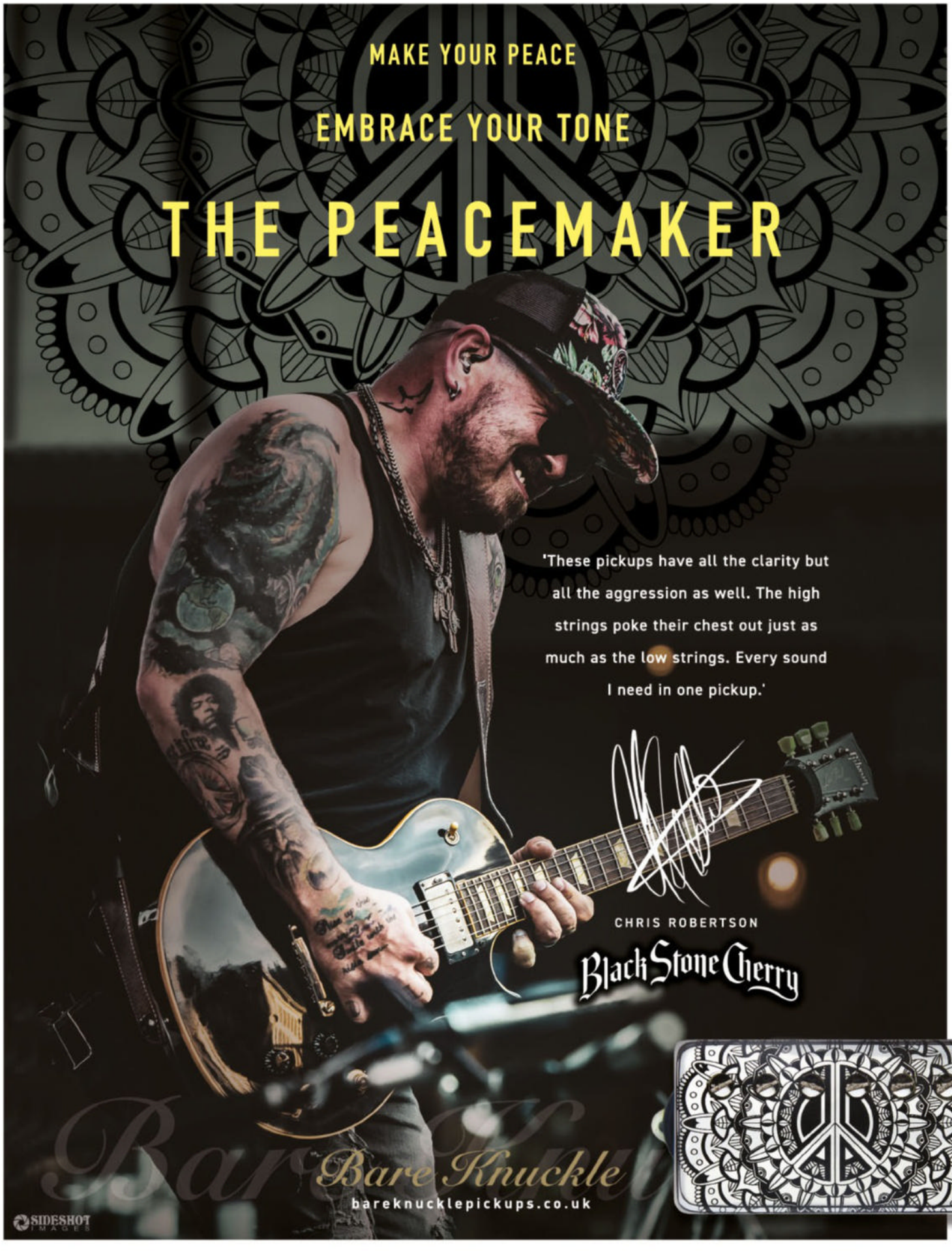
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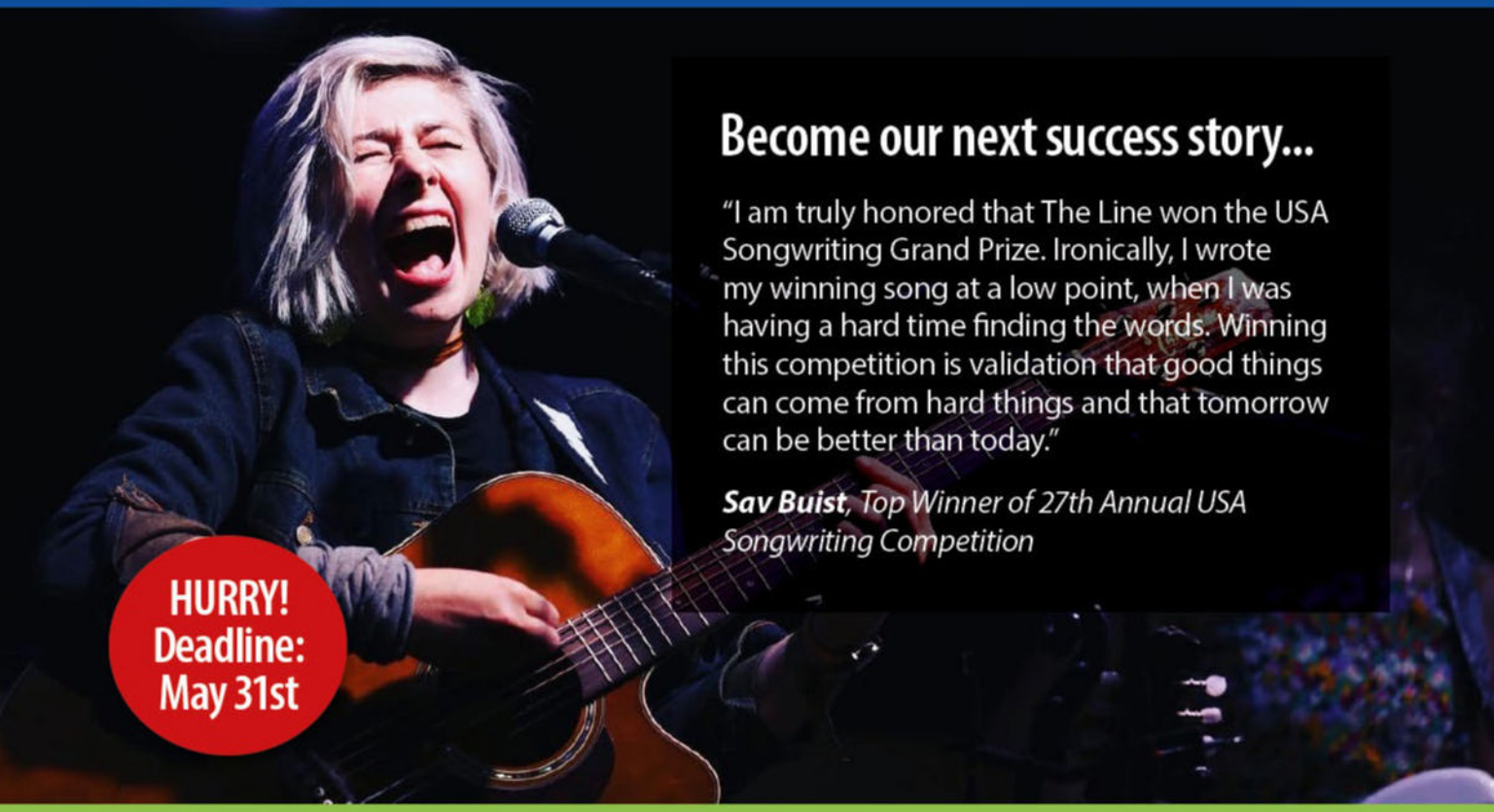

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JESSE GRESS, R.I.P.

HE WAS A warm, confident presence the first time I met him, at Todd Rundgren's rehearsal space in San Rafael, California. It was late summer 1997, and I was there to interview Todd about his *With a Twist* album as he and his band worked through the material for their upcoming tour. I was nervous — Todd was my first big interview, and I was a huge fan.

Jesse (left) and Todd, in 2015

But before I met the man, I found myself waiting in a room off the rehearsal space and chatting with an imperturbably cool cat named Jesse Gress, Todd's guitarist and the talented wizard who, among other things, freed Todd up by handling a fair share of his music's intricate and stylistically varied guitar work. Jesse put me at ease and made me feel welcome. It was a short encounter, but one that has resonated with me ever since because of his generosity to a greenhorn music writer 3,000 miles from home.

It was 21 years later that we spoke again, when I came onboard as *Guitar Player*'s editor-in-chief. Three months into my tenure, Jesse had decided to take time off to tour with Todd and work on another music book to add to his growing authorship. He did not return to our pages, to my disappointment. As anyone who has read *Guitar Player* knows, Jesse Gress was an institution. You couldn't read the magazine without stopping for one of his lessons, masterworks that combined a multitude of styles and techniques with the tremendous melodic sensibilities he brought to his musical examples. In addition to being a consummate interpreter of the artists represented in his lessons, Jesse was a kind guide who made learning enjoyable, no matter how much hard work was involved. We are all better players because of him.

And now he's gone. On February 21, Jesse passed away at his home in Woodstock. He was 67. As many know, Jesse was in poor health in recent years. In 2020, following double pneumonia, flu B strain and sepsis, he was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, and required a lung transplant.

Mourn him, but celebrate him too, through his many works. He leaves behind hundred of transcriptions as well as numerous books. Donations in Jesse's name can be made to Todd Rundgren's Spirit of Harmony Foundation, which provides support for music and music education, by visiting spiritofharmony.org; and to Max's Kansas City Project, serving the arts youth community, by visiting MaxsKansasCity.org, or by mail to P.O. Box 4431 Kingston, NY 12402. Be sure to indicate that your contribution is in Jesse's memory. Rest in peace, Jesse Gress.

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CONTENT

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Christopher Scapelliti, chris.scapelliti@futurenet.com

SENIOR EDITOR Art Thompson, arthur.thompson@futurenet.com

ART EDITOR Philip Cheesbrough, philip.cheesbrough@futurenet.com

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ADVERTISING SALES

HEAD OF INDUSTRY: MUSIC Brian Preston brian.preston@futurenet.com

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Robert Dye robert.dye@futurenet.com, (732) 241-7437

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Jeff Donnenwerth jeff.donnenwerth@futurenet.com, (678) 427-1535

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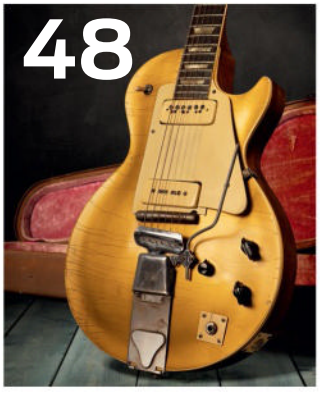

JUSTIN BORUCKI (LES PAUL), ROSS HALFIN (SLASH)

ON THE COVER
Slash photographed by Ross Halfin

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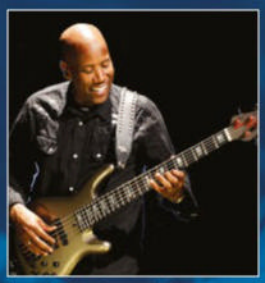

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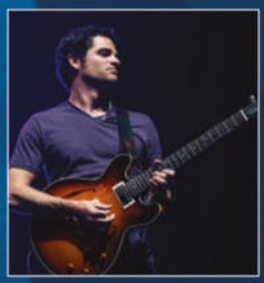

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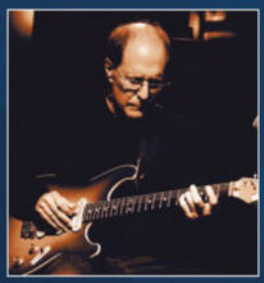

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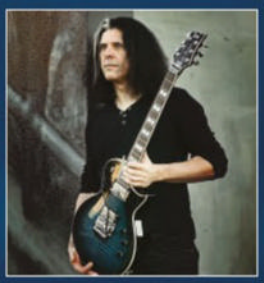

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INFINITE HORIZON

Patch Rubin coaxes a dimensional acoustic voice from his superbly crafted Wide Sky Guitars P125C electric.

BY DAVE HUNTER

PATCH RUBIN LAUNCHED Wide Sky Guitars in the mid 2010s with several acoustic guitar models. He branched into building electrics a couple of years ago with the P125, a non-cutaway semi-hollow design with a 16th-fret neck joint, and it quickly became a main squeeze for Gary Clark Jr. Now comes the P125C, a cutaway version of that model, which I'm looking at this issue.

Rubin's bio reads like the perfect backstory for a guy destined to build artfully functional guitars. Born in Albuquerque, raised in New York, Rubin trained at the Guitar Institute of Technology in L.A. in his youth before working as a tech for two years at Andy Brauer's legendary Studio Rentals business, servicing the instruments of countless big-name pros. Some 10 years on the road as a touring musician followed, peppered by side gigs as a jeweler, carpenter and custom furniture maker, before he established Wide Sky Guitars in Taos, New Mexico. Then, around the middle of 2021, Rubin and his wife moved the business to Hawaii's Big Island, where they now run a 100 percent off-grid, solar-powered shop and catch all their own water.

The P125C is the sweet new creation from that shop. A relatively small-bodied guitar, it puts me in mind of the Gibson ES-125TCD of the 1960s, although its dimensions are considerably more bijou than that, with a lower-bout width of just 12 7/8 inches and a depth of 1 3/8 inches. It's also made from entirely solid woods, rather than laminates. The bulk of the body is constructed from a chunk of mahogany, routed out to create substantial chambers, while the top is carved from solid curly maple. Explains Rubin, "It's really important to me that an electric guitar sounds great unplugged." The glued-in neck is carved from mahogany, and has an ebony fingerboard with a 12-inch radius. Fretboard aside, the entire piece is finished in hand-rubbed Osmo PolyX, a type

of oil/wax hybrid treatment that results in a rich, three-dimensional glowing finish. It not only feels great, with a tactile, open-pore surface, but even smells great. The guitar tops out at only around six and a half pounds.

The neck is an interesting creation, built to a scale length of 24.562 inches and carved to a medium-full "C" profile that feels sublime in the hand. It plays faultlessly from bone nut to body joint, strings bending smoothly over the relatively narrow and immaculately well-dressed frets. A proprietary volute behind the nut adds strength to that traditionally weak part of the build without getting in the way of your lower-fret chording, and feels surprisingly comfortable against the edge of the hand in first position. The rear of the back-angled headstock sports its own thin mahogany facing, while around the front, a diminutive truss-rod cover hides the access point in the ebony-faced headstock.

"I'M A BIG BELIEVER IN SOURCING COMPONENTS FROM SMALLER MANUFACTURERS. THEIR LOVE FOR THEIR CRAFT HELPS BRING UP THE LEVEL OF THE BUILD"

The engine room features a pair of P-90 single-coil pickups custom-made by highly respected small-shop winder Curtis Novak, and wired through a traditional four-knob control complement with a three-way toggle switch. Of the pickup selection, Rubin tells *GP*, "Until I started building the P125 in 2018, I only had two electric guitars, both with humbuckers. I was listening to Gary Clark Jr. nonstop while designing the P125, so I put P-90s in the first one. I'd been missing out! The P-90 sound is all I want to play now.

"I'm a big believer in sourcing components from smaller manufacturers," he adds. They include Gabriel Tenorio, who hand winds each set of strings; pickup maker Curtis Novak; Jason and Elizabeth Schroeder, who make the bridge hardware; and Mitch Emerson, who provides the Bumblebee caps. "Their love for their craft really helps bring up the level of the build," Rubin says.

Interestingly, Rubin uses a trapeze bridge to send the strings over the Schroeder Tune-o-matic–style bridge, which he tells us is as much an aesthetic choice as anything, since the solid central core of the P125C could take a stoptail with no problem. A set of Golden Age Restoration open-gear tuners rounds out the aged-nickel hardware.

Played unplugged, the P125C has a depth and richness of tone that I don't hear in many solidbodies or laminated semis, along with an appealing compression to the response when you hit it hard. I tried out the P125C with a 1966 Fender Princeton combo and a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab. In each instance, the guitar's acoustic voice played through beautifully into the amplified tone. It sounds much as it looks: rich, warm and luxuriant, but with even greater depth and dimension.

In broad strokes, the P125C has the feel and response of a thinline semi-hollow, but with somewhat more woodiness and roundness in the core tone, and more smoothness amid the classic P-90 grit and granularity. There's good thickness, body and sonic girth overall, with plenty of detail and clarity, the latter easily emphasized by rolling down the volume controls on the Novak P-90s. It's easy to see how Gary Clark Jr. took to the model, and it's certainly an expressive nouveau blues machine, but I can also see it excelling at anything from gnarly rock and roll, to expressive electric indie-folk, to ballsier roots-rock and beyond. The Wide Sky P125C delivers cool stuff from a creative and inspiring maker, and it's a beauty to behold.

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UNFORGETTABLE

With *Dirty*, **Malina Moye** leaves an indelible record of her singular style.

BY JOE BOSSO | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISAIAH MAYS

IN 2010, MALINA MOYE became the first African-American woman to perform the National Anthem on guitar at a professional sports event, a match-up between the Minnesota Vikings and the Dallas Cowboys. She's gone on to play the anthem at other events since then, but she treasures the memory of the first time she walked on a football field with her Strat. "People were freaking out, like, 'Jimi Hendrix did that years ago. Can this girl really do it?'" she recalls. "I didn't look at it like that. I was just excited that I was asked to play. Little did I know it would be a historical moment."

On her 2009 debut, *Diamonds & Guitars*, Moye established herself as a forceful and imaginative singer, songwriter and guitarist, capable of blending R&B, pop, funk, hip-hop and rock in a way that sounded seamless. Her audience grew with subsequent releases, the 2014 EP *Rock & Roll Baby* and the 2019 full-length *Bad as I Wanna Be*. Now she's set to make her biggest splash yet with *Dirty* (WCE Records), a power-packed and musically diverse collection of inspirational originals (and one sublime Led Zeppelin cover) that suggests she's just beginning to hit her stride.

"I CAN'T BE IN ONE BOX. IT'S LIKE I ALWAYS SAY, 'THE NOTES DON'T KNOW THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE IN A BOX'"

"The album is songs, stories and guitar solos," Moye says with a laugh. "It's funny, because people always tell you to pick a lane as an artist, but I was never comfortable with that. I play rock, I play soul, I play funk — that's the Malina Moye sound. I can't be in one box. It's like I always say, 'The notes don't know they're supposed to be in a box.'"

The rhythm-guitar sound on some of new album's tracks is pretty brutal and direct. It's almost got an EDM-like heaviness.

EDM — wow, that's interesting you hear it that

way. The sound was a reflection of my attitude. With the first single "Say My Name," I was taking a stand for myself — "I'm here making it happen, and you will remember my name." I wanted the guitar to sound powerful: the way the chords crunch; but even the solos, I wanted them to sound hot. I used a Boss Metal Zone, one of my favorite pedals. It's buttery and thick, and it just nails it. I put that with a Fender Hot Rod DeVille 212 amp and a wah. That's the sound.

Now, with the solo on "Say My Name," I wanted it to sound like a video game. There was no way a blues situation would work with that, so I thought, I've got to come at this like I'm a metal player. That's the zone I was in.

Love that solo. Also "Over Ur Lies" and "Courage" — beautifully phrased. Do you write and demo solos, or are they improvised?

I lean toward spontaneity, but I always want to honor the song. In "Courage," I wanted to show taste, not so much flash, so my mind went, What if I were Paul Jackson Jr.? Only I'm not Paul Jackson Jr., I'm Malina Moye, so you get the vibe of both. It was about nuance. That was a one-take thing. There was a note that bothered me, but I said, Uh-uh, you're going to leave it just as it is.

You do a sweet and delightful cover of "D'yer Mak'er." I was waiting to see how you would approach that solo — "Will she quote Jimmy Page?" But you didn't.

No, not at all, and I'll tell you why: Because I'm not Jimmy Page. [*laughs*] I'm being honest. There's only one Jimmy Page, and he's it.

You could have covered dozens of other Zeppelin songs. What was it about "D'yer Mak'er" that spoke to you?

It actually had a lot to do with the order of the other songs on the album. Throughout the album, I was trying to show the emotional ride a person goes through before they can arrive at peace and forgiveness. With "D'yer Mak'er," I thought, "It's not about another person; it's about a thing that somebody else is trying to take away." Led Zeppelin's version was so sexual and so good, but I knew I could do it my own way and still honor them.

Have you sent your version to Jimmy Page? Do you know if he's heard it?

That would have been up to my lawyer to get the clearance. [*laughs*] I don't know if Jimmy's heard it. But you know what would be cool? I'd love to cover it with Robert Plant. Wouldn't that be something? Sometimes you wind up on the same shows, so you never know.

You've also covered Jimi Hendrix in the past. Do you ever feel trepidation doing songs by guitar legends?

I don't think that way, because I don't put myself in their category. I'm a fan. These guys are the reason why I play. I could never do what they did, but I try to share the moment and give back what they gave me.

I don't get scared of playing their songs, and it goes back to what my dad said to me years ago. He said, "I've got good news and bad news for you. The bad news is, no matter how hard you try, you're never gonna be Jimmy Page. You'll never be Hendrix or Prince or any of those people. Now, you want the good news?" I said, "How can there be good news? Daddy, you just told me I'm not going to be anybody. You crushed my dreams." And he said, "No, no, because the good news is, they're never gonna be you. Use *that*." Once I took that to heart, I felt free to do whatever I wanted.

Being left-handed, you used to flip your Strat upside down. You don't have to do that anymore, right?

Not anymore, now that I've got models from the Fender Custom Shop. They've built me some really incredible guitars. When you flip the guitar upside down you'll have some issues, because of the knobs and things; you can't bear down the way you should. When Fender first built me a guitar, I said, "I need it to be a left-handed body with a right-handed headstock, and it's got to be strung backward and the nut has to be flipped." That probably sounded funny, but it worked out.

Plus, I have my own signature strings with Dean Markley. I mix up the gauges because I don't have man hands, but with these strings, I can really wail. Also, the pickups I use are important. I've got the DiMarzio True Velvet and Virtual Vintage Blues pickups, and they really make my leads sound strong. My whole thing is, the sound has to be thick. I don't want a sound that gets lost in the background. It's got to cut through and grab you.

You play a Flying V in certain parts of the "Say My Name" video. Did you use that on the album?

I did. I used it for some layering. The Strat is the main guitar, but Gibson gave me a replica of Jimi's '69 Flying V. It's a lefty and it's strung upside down. I used that on some parts. It's beautiful. The mix of those two guitars really worked great. I didn't need anything more.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

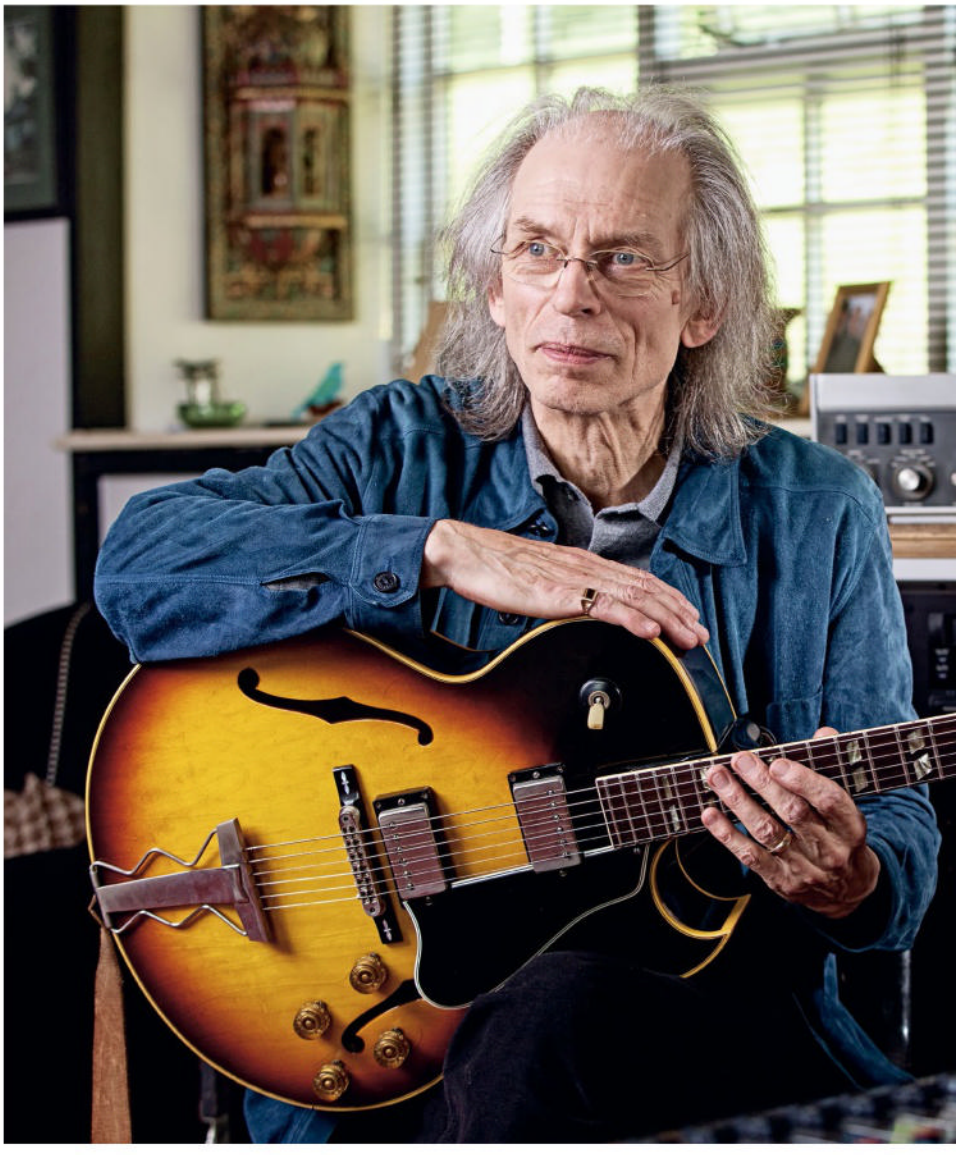
Malina Moye

"F.I.N.E.," "Say My Name," "Over Ur Lies," "Courage," "D'yer Mak'er"

TIP SHEET

These are the habits that have made **Steve Howe** a stylistic and technical virtuoso.

BY JOE BOSSO



"**MY ADVICE JUST** comes from my experience," Yes guitar legend Steve Howe says of his guitar-playing tips. "I'm completely self-taught on the guitar, which means nobody sat me down and said, 'This is the right way to play; that's the wrong way.' But there was a kind of beauty and freedom in the way I learned, because I never felt restricted in any way. Playing the guitar felt like a journey to me, and it was one that I was keenly interested in."

He admits to experiencing moments of self-doubt. "It happened from time to time when I was younger," he says. "Somebody would say something to me like, 'That doesn't sound very good,' and my whole world caved in. Over the years, I realized that I shouldn't overreact to little things, because most of the time that's what they are. People are always going to criticize, so it's really a matter of how you respond to what they have to say.

"A guitarist can always come up with reasons why they're not further along," he continues. "But to me, the way around that — and it's the most important thing, really — is to never give up on your dream." He laughs. "It sounds like a cliché. But there has to be a dream."

On that inspiring note, Howe runs down his top tips for guitarists.

1. DON'T PRACTICE. PLAY!

"It's fine if you want to do scales for a quick warm-up. I play scales myself occasionally. But I'd say that 95 percent of my contact with the guitar is spent improvising. I might noodle around or work on a tune I'm writing. Sometimes I'll just strum for a while, especially if I haven't played for four or five days, which is rare for me. Maybe I'll play an Everly Brothers song. What I'm getting at is, you're supposed to play the guitar. It's supposed to be fun; it's not supposed to feel like drudgery. I think back to my earlier years, and this was the same approach I had even then. One of the greatest joys I had was improvising on the guitar and just letting my mind roam.

"Speaking of warming up, this holds true for your guitar, too. To make a guitar speak, you have to play it for a bit to encourage it to project and sound good. They did a scientific study about leaving the guitar unplayed for periods of time. What they discovered was that the dynamic range was much less until somebody had played it for 10 minutes or 15 minutes. That makes sense to me."

2. GET FINGERBOARD KNOWLEDGE

"The fingerboard of a guitar is fascinating. There are so many different positions in which you can play the same note. Even after all these years, sometimes I'll play an inversion and think, Wow, I hadn't thought about that one. The fingerboard is where your music comes from. Obviously, you have to use your picking hand, too, but the fretting hand on the fingerboard — that's where all the possibilities are.

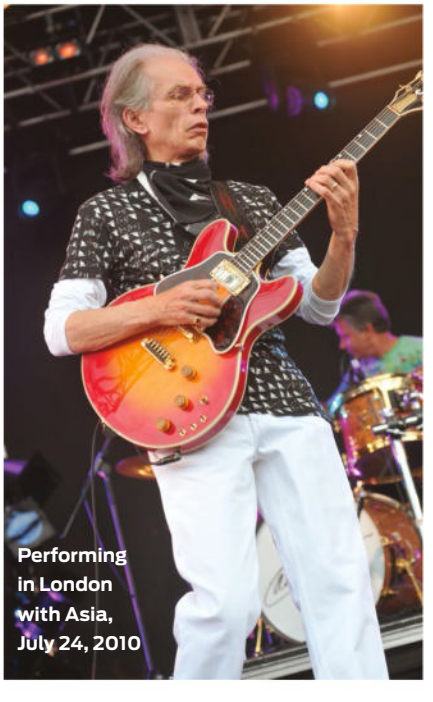
"There are various ways to gain fingerboard knowledge. I guess you can always pick up manuals as a starting point. It's like cab drivers learning their way around London: They need a map — or at least they used to. However you choose to familiarize yourself with the fingerboard and all it offers, you want to end up feeling unchallenged — like, no matter what you want to play, you'll know where your fingers should land. And as I said, there are so many possibilities. You might play something one day, and the next day you'll go, 'There's got to be a better fingering for this.' That happens all the time."

3. FIND YOUR IDEAL PLAYING POSTURE

"Growing up, I never thought about my

ADAM GASSON

Steve Howe with his 1964 Gibson ES -175D, undoubtedly the most famous of his guitars.



Performing in London with Asia, July 24, 2010

KEVIN NIXON

posture or how playing the guitar could hurt my back. I'd play wherever I was — sitting on a bed, stretched out my sofa... anywhere and anyplace. And, of course, there were so many years standing onstage and playing. Over time, that can present certain problems. When I see early pictures of me onstage, I can't believe how Bill Wyman–ish my playing position was. I wore the guitar up so high. At the end of a tour, I used to go to see a chiropractor. I finally got fixed up with treatments, but I also discovered that I had to re-adjust and rethink my playing positions. Now I don't wear the guitar up so high; it's just sort of resting there.

"For certain things, I prefer to sit now, specifically when I play solo guitar. I discovered that the guitar needs to be in a position that I can always call my own. Like when I play 'Clap,' for example: I'll play acoustic, and I'll use a foot stool on my right foot. It's weird — lots of people use a stool for their left foot. But I discovered that the stool under my right foot works best. I can get around the different ways I have to play.

"You need to look into ways that you can play without doing yourself any harm. You might need to make certain adjustments between the way you play electric or acoustic, because the two instruments are so different — their weight and how they fit against your body."

"PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS GOING TO CRITICIZE, SO IT'S REALLY A MATTER OF HOW YOU RESPOND TO WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY"

4. TRUST YOUR GUIDING EAR

"For the first 10 years, learning an instrument is a physical exercise. You're learning how to make notes and how to move your fingers. That's all important, but after that, then what? The answer is, you need to follow your guiding ear. That's what's going to lead you toward your musical direction. You need to attune yourself to how you hear sounds and what they're telling you.

"I think I first became aware of this when I listened to Kenny Burrell. He seemed to have a special sense about sound, but it wasn't all about technique. I think it was about the way he heard its sounds — his guiding ear. He always sounded the same, and he always sounded great. He used a [*Gibson*] Super 400, on the front pickup. And that's a great guitar and a great pickup, but the thing was, I think he always saw his sound through to the end. He followed it where it wanted to go.

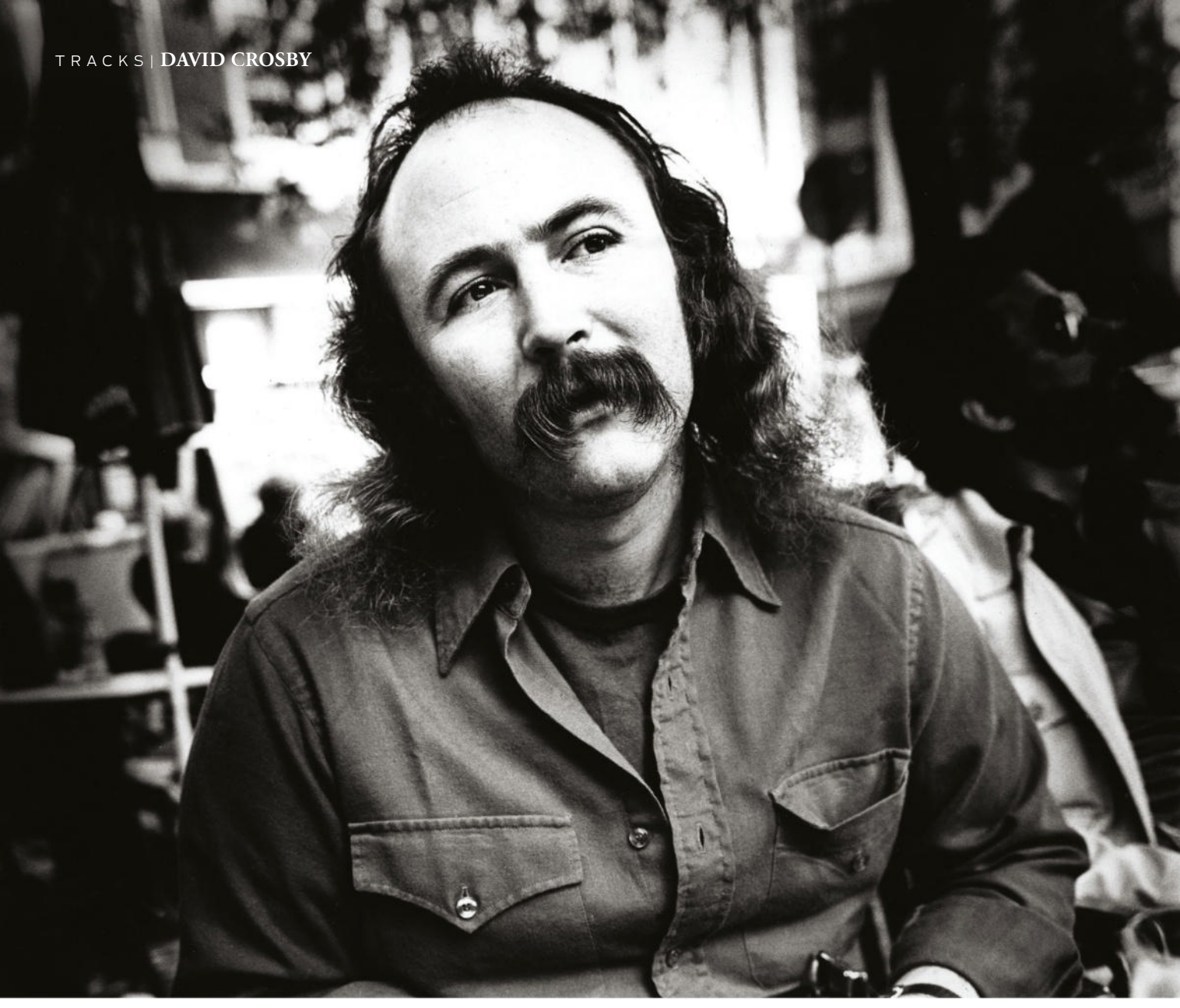
"In other words, you play the part — it exists, but that isn't the end. Stick around for the mix, so you can go, 'I want the guitar on the left. Can you add a bit of reverb? Oh, no, for God's sake, turn it down.' You want to be part of the way your guitar goes out to the world. It's got to be the way you hear it. That's what I try to do: the playing it, the physical part. The rest is all up to your guiding ear and how you really want to sound."

5. RESEARCH ALL GUITARISTS AND STYLES

"When I was young, I didn't leave any stone unturned. I wasn't just a guitar fan; I was a guitar researcher. I read all the mags and bought the records. I listened to radio shows. I just had to know about everything that was going on.

"I guess it's because I always had an adventurous spirit. I heard Chet Atkins and he made me think that I could play any kind of guitar. I saw Wes Montgomery when I was 16. I tried to mimic everybody I heard: Jimmy Bryant, Speedy West. There were so many guitarists in the jazz field, like Charlie Christian, Tal Farlow, Lenny Burrell... This list could go on for a while. And then John McLaughlin came along with so many other guitarists that I could really dig a lot. There was so much to learn from. And hey, it's okay to steal licks, too.

"Instead of absorbing one style only, listen to other genres and distill them into what you do. It's amazing how people limit themselves. Earlier today, I was listening to [*Maurice*] Ravel. I've always peppered my listening time with classical music. You can go on so many musical journeys if you give yourself the chance."



MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Weeks before his death, the legendary **David Crosby** spoke with us about treasured sessions from his long and brilliant career.

BY JOE BOSSO

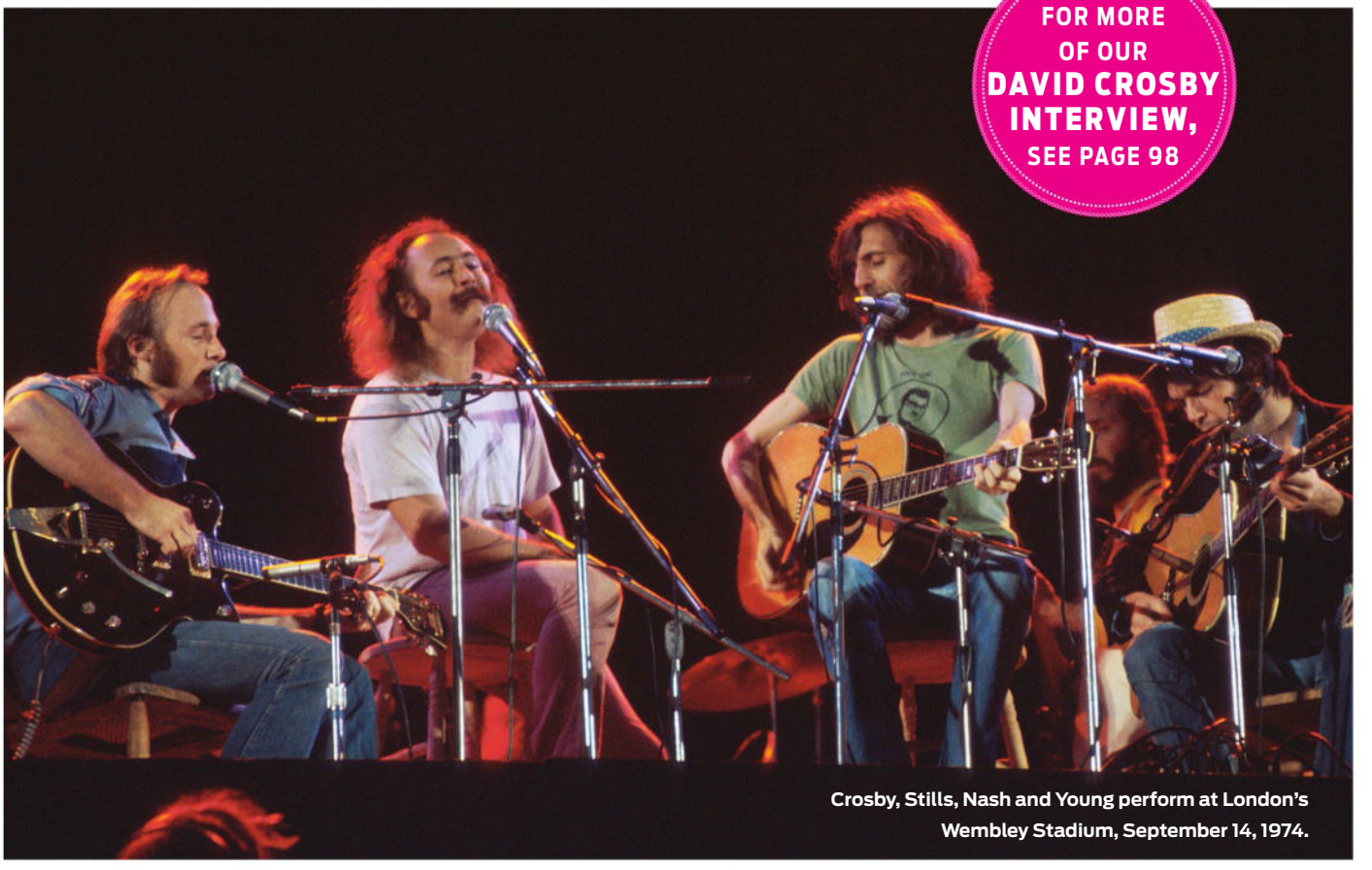
"I HATE RETIREMENT," David Crosby grumbled when we caught up with him in late November 2022. The legendary octogenarian singer-songwriter and guitarist had announced the previous year that he was calling it a day on touring life after six decades on the road, and he was anything but happy about it. "It's miserable not being able to go out and play," he said, "but after a certain point, it is what it is. Touring is too hard for a guy my age, and tendonitis has affected my ability to play guitar. It's tough. There's lots of guys who love being retired, but that isn't me. It sucks."

Sadly, the celebrated singer, guitarist and songwriter would not be returning to the road. Crosby passed away this past January 18 from COVID-19. He was 81.

In our conversation, Crosby revealed that he was still making music — "I can still sing as good as ever, maybe even better," he said — and he was psyched about his continuing collaboration with Becca Stevens, Michelle Willis and Michael League, better known as the Lighthouse Band, which began with 2016's aptly named *Lighthouse* album. "Whoa, boy, are they fun!" he raved. "I've admired them since they started. They're such brilliant musicians and singers, and they're fabulous people. We get along

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

FOR MORE OF OUR DAVID CROSBY INTERVIEW, SEE PAGE 98



Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young perform at London's Wembley Stadium, September 14, 1974.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

great. It was an accidental thing — I met Michael and started writing some tunes with him. The chemistry just blossomed, and then I started working with the whole band. I bring stuff out of them, they bring stuff out of me. It's beautiful."

In 2018, during one of his last full tours, Crosby performed with the Lighthouse Band in support of his album *Here If You Listen*. Their gig at the famed Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, New York, has just been released in both physical and digital formats as *Live at the Capitol Theatre*. "That was a fabulous night, and the recording we made is tremendous," he said. "Of the live albums I've done, this is by far my favorite. I like it even more than *Four Way Street*," his 1971 live album with Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

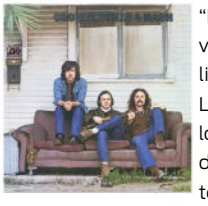
The musician admitted that coming up with a setlist was never one of his favorite aspects of touring. "That's what happens when you've got a lot of songs," he explained. "It's not so much about what to play than it is what to leave out. No matter what I did, people would always say, 'Why didn't you do such and such?'" He laughed. "I could have worse problems."

A number of Crosby's most iconic songs are featured on *Live at the Capitol Theatre*, and here he discusses four tracks — the original recordings from the CS&N and CSN&Y albums, and the reworked versions — as well as "1974," a song from the album that sat untouched for nearly 50 years.

"GUINNEVERE"

"THAT OPEN TUNING GAVE ME 'GUINNEVERE,' 'DÉJÀ VU' AND A NUMBER OF OTHER SONGS"

CROSBY, STILLS & NASH (1969)



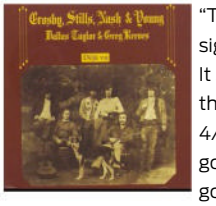
"It's such a nice new version we did on the live album. The Lighthouse Band really loved the song, so we decided to play it together. We did it a little differently, but that's okay. Songs aren't static. Most people seem to have problems re-imagining their songs, particularly if they're seen as famous or whatever. I never had that problem, and the Lighthouse Band were game to explore. The funny thing is, not only didn't we play the song like it is on record but we didn't even play it the same way twice ourselves.

"When I wrote the song, I was playing around with an open tuning somebody showed me [*low to high, E B D G A D*]. It was the first time I ever worked with anything other than standard tuning or a drop D. I retuned the guitar and started playing, and my mind was blown. That tuning gave me 'Guinnevere,' 'Déjà Vu' and a number of other songs. It blended jazz and folk, which is a really cool place to be, although that wasn't my intention. I was just transported by it.

"Stephen [*Stills*] and Graham [*Nash*] thought it was a weird song. [*laughs*] They knew it was good, but they thought it was pretty out there. But that's the point! That's one of the things I liked about it. It sets a mood."

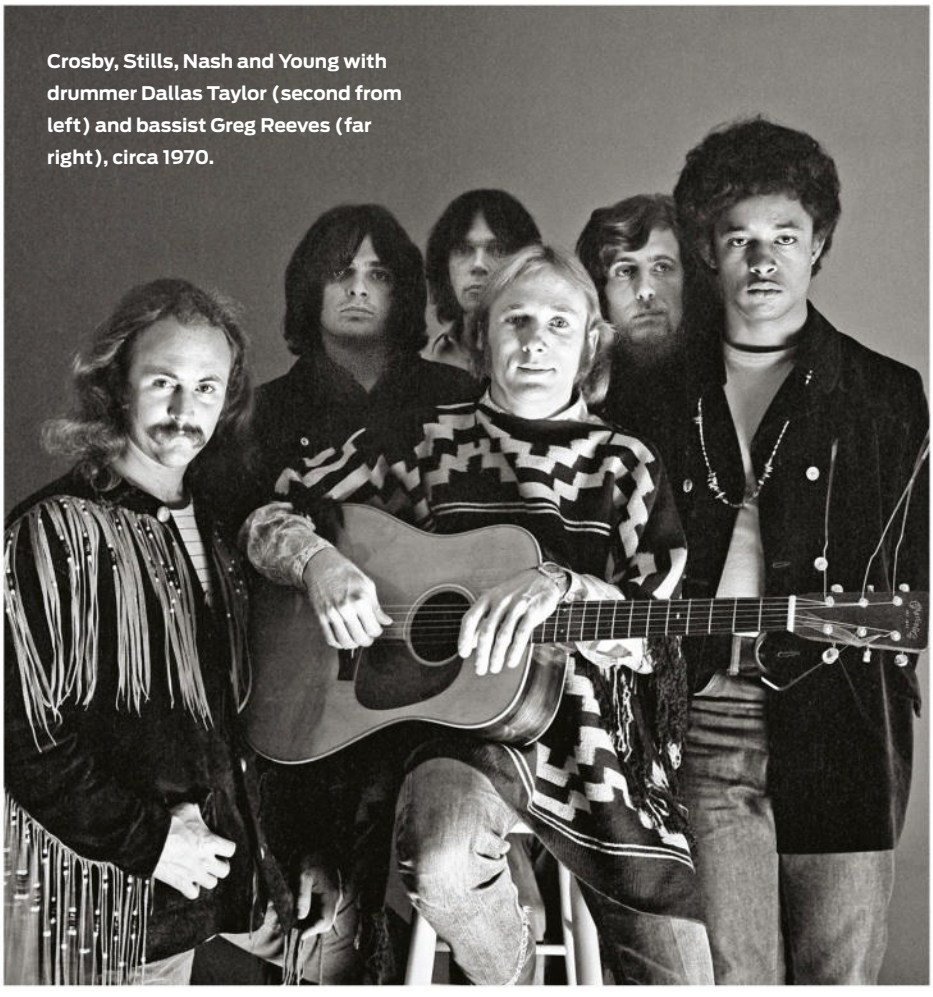
"DÉJÀ VU"

CROSBY, STILLS, NASH & YOUNG, *DÉJÀ VU* (1970)



"There's several time signatures in this song. It starts off in 6/8 and then goes to a regular 4/4, but in the chorus it goes to 7/4. At the end it goes to 4/4. I wasn't necessarily trying to put a jazz sensibility into it; it just came out that way. I've heard people say, 'It spins me around in a circle,' and my attitude is like, 'Good. As long as it moves you.'

"I played acoustic and electric guitars when we cut it. We did a lot of takes of the



Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young with drummer Dallas Taylor (second from left) and bassist Greg Reeves (far right), circa 1970.

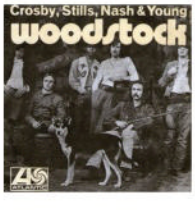
song. I've read somewhere that we did 100 takes. That's just crazy. We would never have done 100 takes of anything. Stephen and Graham thought this was another weird song [*laughs*], but that's the kind of stuff I write. Plus, it was weirdo days back then. But the guys came along and got into it. Funnily enough, they picked the song as the title of the album. It wasn't my idea. I never even suggested it.

"The new version is way different from what's on the *Déjà Vu* album. It spreads out very leisurely. The chemistry of the Lighthouse Band changed it around in a really cool way."

"ALMOST CUT MY HAIR"
CROSBY, STILLS, NASH & YOUNG, *DÉJÀ VU* (1970)

"I once said this was a juvenile song. It's not a complex song; it's simple, but I still like it. I'm not ashamed of it. I wish I could take credit for the guitar parts, but that was Stephen and Neil [*Young*]. I played them the song on acoustic, and they instinctively knew what to do. They attacked it. [*laughs*] I never had to show them parts. When you have guys that fucking good, you don't need to show them anything. It was such a joy to watch them go at it. It's a fun song that has some guts to it. Many, many people say that it's one of their favorites. And I say, 'Thank you.'"

"WOODSTOCK"
CROSBY, STILLS, NASH & YOUNG, *DÉJÀ VU* (1970)

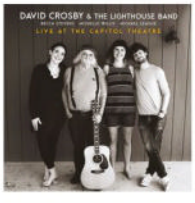


"Joni Mitchell gave us a demo of the song. It was just her singing and playing guitar, and it was beautiful, of course. But it was completely different from what we ended up doing with it. I loved it immediately and thought it offered us a lot of territory to explore.

"I wish I could say that I had a plan to really rock it out, but it just happened, like so many things. Stills came up with the electric intro — he had already been working around with the song. It's the only track on the album where all of us played together in one room. I keep talking about chemistry — that was chemistry, boy. You drop a song on CSN and Y, and you're gonna see stuff happen. I played acoustic, and Stephen and Neil played electric. That was one of our go-to moves — guitar heroics from those guys. We could do that because they were that good.

"I never thought it would be a single. None of us did — we thought it was too weird. At that time, our singles were 'Marrakesh Express' and 'Suite: Judy Blue Eyes' — stuff that was a little softer. We weren't known as a hard-rock band, but we did an amazing job with this one."

"1974"
DAVID CROSBY & THE LIGHTHOUSE BAND, *LIVE AT THE CAPITOL THEATRE* (2022)



"Almost 50 years after I started this song, it's now a reality. This is a little like 'Tamalpais High' [*from his 1971 solo debut album,* If I Could Only Remember My Name], in that I had a song without any words. So what I would do was, I'd stack vocals like horns. It's a totally valid thing to do.

"THAT WAS CHEMISTRY. DROP A SONG ON CSN&Y, AND YOU'RE GONNA SEE STUFF HAPPEN"

I had one of those things sitting around in my garage, and Michael League found it. He got excited: 'Hey, this is an unfinished song!' I said to him, 'Hey, if you want to write some words to it, go for it, baby.' He and the ladies jumped on the song and wrote the words.

"There's no significance to the title other than that's when I started to write it. They came up with the title, not me. It's mind-blowing that something from five decades ago is now a new song, but that just speaks to the creativity of the Lighthouse Band. They're a creative bunch. They see something and they just do it. I have to work hard just to keep up with them."

JACK ROBINSON/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

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Euro Trip

This Wandré Roby is a groovy relic from the 1960s Italian guitar maker.

BUDDY MILLER HAS a lot to answer for. Few guitarists lusted after a Wandré before this first-call Nashville session ace, solo artist and producer began churning out lithe, buttery riffs on one of these oddball guitars. Thanks to Miller, we know these things sound fantastic. As such, they have become the most collectible of the stylish, modernist Italian-made electric guitars of the 1960s, and highly worthy acquisitions for their looks, rarity and playability.

The circa-1960 Wandré Roby featured here sits in the sweet spot between art and utility. Whereas some Wandré models look more like a Salvador Dalí painting than a guitar, the Roby abounds with the maker's signature features and esthetics, while it offers familiarity in form and function.

The man behind Wandré guitars was born Antonio Pioli in Cavriago, Reggio Emilia, Italy, in 1926. His father, a noted luthier, nicknamed him Vandré — meaning "to go in reverse" in the regional dialect — for his eclectic

THE ROBY ABOUNDS WITH THE MAKER'S SIGNATURE FEATURES AND ESTHETICS, WHILE IT OFFERS FAMILIARITY IN FORM AND FUNCTION

tendencies, and the moniker became an entirely suitable brand for his guitars when Antonio started building them himself. Unlike so many Italian electric guitars that would follow, which were arguably "style first and functionality be damned," Wandré guitars' fashion-forward appearance potentially disguises the fact that they were made by a luthier who was heir to a great tradition in the craft, and who was serious about improving all aspects of the instrument in his work.

Pioli built a factory in Cavriago, just about an hour's drive by today's roads from Stradivarius's former workplace in Cremona,

From its aluminum neck to its odd fretboard inlays and trapezoidal pickups, the Roby is an eye-catcher.

and designed it as a circular structure to ease workflow and collaboration among his team of makers. From around 1957 to 1969, he manufactured a wide range of models on the premises, although in rather small numbers overall. An artist first and foremost, and an eclectic modernist at heart, Pioli was also a friend to both Dalí and Brigitte Bardot (his curvaceous B.B. model was designed in her honor). And if his eccentric designs kept his guitars from becoming popular at the time, they eventually helped him establish a niche that has become valued and appreciated many years later.

GUITAR COURTESY OF T.R. CRANDALL GUITARS; PHOTOS BY DREW GANSZ

BY DAVE HUNTER

Miller recalls that he purchased his first Wandré Soloist model in the 1970s from a Colorado pawn shop for $50 and went back a year later to buy four more at the same price once he'd realized how great it actually played and sounded. You'd likely have to pay a hundred times that price today for an example in decent condition, and perhaps significantly more than that for some of the rarest models, such as the Bikini (with a built-in amp) or the B.B.

Though less dramatically styled in its lines than the more extreme designs, the Roby model sports the myriad quirks that have come to define Wandré guitars. It carries a trio of trapezoidal single-coil pickups made by Davoli, notably lively and slightly microphonic and the ideal enhancement to the guitar's sonic personality. They are wired through a push-button switching system that allows individual on/off selection of each, with shared volume and tone controls. The neck pickup is reversed and wired out-of-phase to add a funky edge to the sonic options.

The simple tail plate has slots for string anchoring and sports the nifty stylized double-V "W" logo, but the bridge itself is even more thoughtfully engineered, if equally unusual. Rather than carrying a row of saddles, it's designed with six small holes through which the strings are threaded, with a small metal knob to adjust the intonation position of each contact point within the tubes. A "pass-under" bridge, it actually functions better than the "wrap-under" bridge found on the first year or so of Gibson Les Pauls in 1952 and early '53 [*see page 52*].

Arguably most noteworthy of all, though, is the Wandré's neck. It's made from aluminum, with the express purpose of avoiding warpage, and is covered with a thin adhesive plastic to present a warmer feel to the hand. It's bolted to a headstock made from a central piece of rosewood, with a wrap-around aluminum plate onto which the tuners are mounted sideways, in the style of a traditional slot-head acoustic guitar. Other than that, most Wandrés sport a lot of plastic in their construction, although our Roby model does feature a slice of bird's-eye maple on its top.

For the crowning touch, the fingerboard is adorned with decorative and informative inlays: Every other one features an inscription that tells the guitar's maker, model and "Export" status, while the image of some unknown rampant animal and two seemingly random shapes fill the remaining positions.

Wandré guitars don't come cheaply or very often at all these days. Should you have the chance to strap one on, you'll not only stand out both visually and sonically but also enjoy a rare treat among vintage treasures.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Aluminum neck
- Bolt-on rosewood-and-aluminum slotted headstock
- Body made from wood, aluminum and plastic fiber
- Three single-coil Davoli pickups
- Console-style pushbutton pickup selector
- "Pass-under" bridge construction

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Torch Bearer

Ben Webster's *Warm Moods* is a searing lesson in melody and skillful phrasing.

THIS PAGE USUALLY focuses on guitar-oriented records, for obvious reasons. That said, this is my third or fourth non-guitar record spanning almost one hundred columns. To complicate matters even more, the few people who have heard tenor saxophonist Ben Webster's *The Warm Moods* playing at my house have asked, "Why are you listening to Muzak?" or said, "My father listened to stuff like this."

All I can say is, we agree to disagree. *The Warm Moods* is one of my all-time favorite jazz records, and it's a must-hear. I've transcribed many of its tunes with awe and humility, so I feel compelled to share this record, because I love it.

The Warm Moods was released in 1961 on Reprise Records, and every track has something special. The great supporting cast of pianist Don Trenner, bassist Don Bagley and drummer Frank Capp underwrite Webster flawlessly. Arranger Johnny Richards does wonders melding a string quartet to the music. They seamlessly take center stage, then duck behind the curtain keeping the spotlight on Mr. Webster. The MVP award goes to Trenner, who takes some lovely instrumental breaks that allow Ben to return as the sole melodic focus. Everyone involved here is a top-notch performer.

Ben's phrasing on *The Warm Moods* is something to behold. It's simple, direct and lovely. He slurs, gives us purposeful delays and employs breath on the reed to create a sound almost more expressive than the human voice. Even more significant is that he conveys the true meaning of the song instrumentally.

For example, when I heard "Nancy (With the Laughing Face)" played instrumentally by John Coltrane on *Ballads*, I thought it was beautiful, but I assumed it was about loss. Ben Webster's equally beautiful version of "Nancy" on *Warm Moods* conveys a positive aspect that's hard to explain. It's not swinging full Pollyanna, but somehow I knew it was a song of awed appreciation. As it turns out, "Nancy" is a father's perspective about his love for his daughter: Frank and young Nancy Sinatra, to be specific. Additionally, "Stella by Starlight" is one of the many beautiful tracks on this LP. I always heard "Stella by Starlight" as a mandatory music school exploration. Ben's version introduced me to the song's romanticism.

BEN WEBSTER WAS A CROONER, A STORYTELLER WHO COULD SING TORCH SONGS THROUGH HIS INSTRUMENT.

"It's Easy to Remember" and "But Beautiful" are tutorials in phrasing and melody. Ben and his fellow musicians, combined with Johnny Richards' great arrangements, make these songs captivating and brimming with a high level of craftsmanship.

That said, I should offer a consumer warning: *The Warm Moods* has cello, viola and two violins and is highly arranged — but don't let that trip you up. Ben Webster's masterful ability to play a melody with intimacy is the star of the show, and *The Warm Moods* has shown me the "right" way to play a song: with simple melodic lines phrased skillfully, and deeply based in harmony, all while avoiding a flood of theory and scales. Ben Webster was a crooner, a storyteller who could sing torch songs through his instrument.

A few years back, the unforgettable New York City bassist Tim Luntzel couldn't make one of my gigs. Per musicians etiquette, he found a sub. The replacement was conscientiously a little confused about his role in the group. Tim said, "Oh, it's kind of a jazz gig, and Jim is the singer." That comes closer to describing my music than anything I've ever heard...maybe because I love the playing of Ben Webster. Hear it for yourself: I recommend visiting the YouTube channel Ben Webster – Topic and listening to "Accent on Youth."

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

BY TERRY CARLETON

Wrapsody in Blue

What's old, covered in sparkly plastic and sounds like a dream? This 1961 Goya S90 by Hagstrom.

IF GUITARS COULD have identity crises, the Goya S90 might qualify for one. It was made in Sweden by Hagstrom, given a Spanish name and sold in the United States. Not only that, it's shaped like a venerable Les Paul and covered in flashy plastics, including a blue sparkle face and a complete wrap of white "mother of toilet seat" pearloid on the back, sides, neck, headstock and fingerboard.

Fewer than 200 of these guitars were made during the model's early 1960s run. Like some other European instrument manufacturers, Hagstrom was known primarily as a maker of accordions. But with the late-'50s guitar boom, the company retooled its plant to include production of electric guitars, hence the use of the otherwise garish plastics and pushbuttons found in these early builds.

WEIRDO FACTOR

While its shape would have been familiar to guitarists of the period, its aesthetics were as wild then as they are now.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

With all that said, this 1961 example plays like a dream. The slim, 22-fret neck has a clear Lucite fingerboard and is smooth to the touch, making for fast and easy playing. The electronics, you may notice, are all attached to a chrome unit that contains the pickups and controls. What's surprising is that the electronics unit was actually swappable! You could choose from two single-coils, as seen here, two humbuckers, or one single-coil.

As for its sound, this guitar does it all, from chimey to growly, and from warm to skinny. It's almost weird how cool, varied and unique the tones are. The pickup button matrix provides the obvious choices — neck, bridge or both — but there is also a solo button that acts as a boost (although it may just be a tone bypass) and a kill button. In addition, there are three roller controls: two for volume and one for global tone. The height of the bridge is adjustable, the saddles are fully intonatable, and the enclosed tuners work quite smoothly and have beautiful fancy engravings on their casings. Their translucent buttons complete the overall plastic aesthetic. Plus, there's a pick holder on the headstock's back!

VALUE

In addition to being made in few numbers, surviving Goya S90 examples are having difficulty standing the test of time due to the materials used in the build. This example suffers from plastics shrinkage, not good for a guitar entirely wrapped in the material. Ardy, my luthier, was able to splice in pieces, re-glue others and use paint to fill in the gaps. In addition, the chambered body is actually made from thin plys of what Ardy referred to as particle board. I got mine cheaply because the tailpiece had pulled so far off the top that the action was more like that of a lap steel guitar!

As for what you might pay, consider that in 1961 the S90 sold new for just over a hundred bucks. Today, this guitar in this condition would set you back around $4,000. I've seen a few selling online for about half that, but most are in bad shape — fixable, perhaps, but not easily. If you have your heart set on one, pay particular attention to the condition of the plastics and the angle of the bridge, and know that you'll probably almost double your investment getting it up into playing condition. Am I glad that I did? Abso-fricken-lutely.

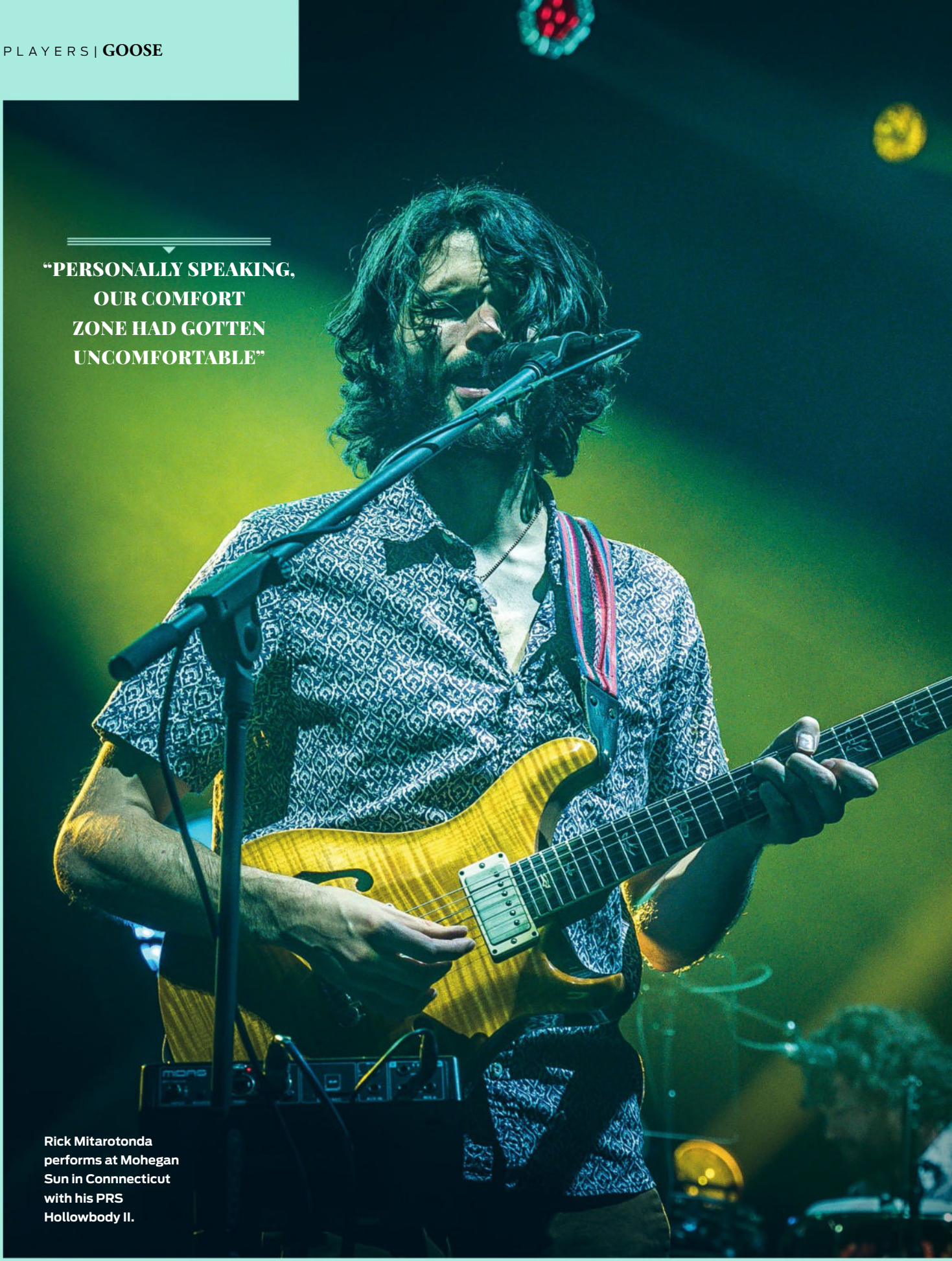
WHY IT RULES

The Goya S90 was an early pioneer in the history of European electrics, and it sounds as good, if not better, than it looks!

My great thanks to Hagstrom (hagstrom-vintage-guitars.se) for making such a terrific guitar, and to my pal Ardy, who brought this one back from the dead!

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com. Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it!

PHOTOS BY MAY YAM



"PERSONALLY SPEAKING, OUR COMFORT ZONE HAD GOTTEN UNCOMFORTABLE"

Rick Mitarotonda performs at Mohegan Sun in Connnecticut with his PRS Hollowbody II.

THRILL — OF THE — HUNT

On *Dripfield*, jam-band breakouts **Goose** let their muse lead them outside their comfort zone. Says guitarist Rick Mitarotonda, "We chase what we hear."

BY JOE BOSSO

ADAM BERTA

A **FUNNY THING HAPPENED** to Goose over the past two years. Following the release of their second album, 2021's *Shenanigan's Nite Club*, the Connecticut-based quintet transitioned from underground darlings to something close to mainstream stars, headlining major venues like Red Rocks and Radio City Music Hall while appearing on network shows such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and *The Tonight Show With Jimmy Fallon*.

Since their formation in 2014, Goose have described themselves as an "indie-groove" outfit, but to their loyal — and rapidly growing — legion of fans, the group's inventive mix of folk, jazz, trance and progressive rock has placed them firmly in the lineage of premier jam bands like Umphrey's McGee and Phish.

So which is it? Are Goose a jam band, or are they something else? Guitarist-singer and founding member Rick Mitarotonda is of two minds. "I don't try to hold any idea that we're not a jam band," he says. "We are most certainly a jam band. We improvise a whole lot, so yeah, we're a jam band. On the other hand, I don't feel qualified to render an opinion, because when you make something, your perspective is skewed."

He pauses and laughs. "We're just doing what we do, and we chase what we hear."

If playing long songs with lots of solos was the only qualifier for jam-band status, then Goose — which includes bassist Trevor Weeks, drummer Ben Atkind, percussionist Jeff Arevalo, and guitarist-keyboardist Peter Anspach — have all the right stuff. From the start, however, they made it clear that they were interested in something more. As an instrumentalist, Mitarotonda can spin a sprawling yarn like nobody's business, but his solos — lyrical, emotive, fleet without being mathy — have an accessible flair. And the band also has a distinctive and welcome knack for writing strong, hook-filled songs carried by Mitarotonda's hearty vocals.

On their third studio album, *Dripfield* (No Coincidence Records), Goose bring all of these elements into clear focus. Some of the songs have been road tested for a few years: "The Whales" is a rousing, country-soaked gem with luxurious slide textures and spunky chicken-pickin' runs, while "Hot Tea" is a spacey, smooth funk epic that casts a magical spell. Another live mainstay, the dreamy, Pink Floyd–like "726," is a poignant ballad highlighted by Mitarotonda's elegant, legato soloing. Two of the more recent cuts — the vibey, pop-tinged "Hungersite" and the transfixing, Afrobeat-flavored title cut — are the album's first two singles, and in their own disparate ways, they lodge themselves into the thicket of your senses and don't let go.

Peter Anspach plays his Suhr Mateus Asato Signature.

"FINDING THE RIGHT LINEUP IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN A BAND. IT'S ALL ABOUT CHEMISTRY"

As their fame continues to grow — and it's only a matter of time before Goose are fully fledged arena headliners — the band members could see themselves facing some tough questions, namely, how to maintain their original fan base while appealing to a wider, more general audience?

"Quite honestly, it's something I haven't really thought about yet," says Anspach, who joined the fold in 2017. "It might sound simplistic, but we're just making the music that we want to make, and hopefully people are down, the old fans and the new ones."

Picking up on that thought, Mitarotonda adds, "We've just been rolling with what's been going on. When we got started and began to home in on how we wanted to make our music and the criteria we wanted to reach for, those things were all intentional. But the way things have progressed from an external point of view, that's just the way things have developed. It's all part of our evolution. We're big believers in evolution." He laughs. "From a musical standpoint, that is."

A lot of jam bands use vocals to break up the instrumental tunes, and to my ears, oftentimes songs and vocals are the weakest link. Not true with you guys.
RICK MITAROTONDA I like singing. I like songs. It's similar to the Grateful Dead: They'd play a song that they really loved, and they didn't want it to be over, so they kept playing. That concept always stuck with me. We improvise in the context of a song. It's meant to be an accompaniment to something of substance.

Let's go through your guitar influences, starting with you, Rick.
MITAROTONDA If I had to pick one guitar player that I look up to, it'd probably be John Scofield. And there's the lineage: Scofield, Wes Montgomery, Charlie Christian. Scofield grew up listening to Wes Montgomery, and Wes grew up listening to Charlie Christian. Those are three of my favorites. Trey Anastasio, of course, is an irrefutable, massive influence on me — and all of us — so that informs a lot of what we do. There are other players, like Mike Stern, Pat Metheny and Kurt Rosenwinkel. I've spent a lot of time listening to them at certain points.

Peter, how about you?
PETER ANSPACH A lot of my influences are more contemporary. When I first started playing guitar, John Frusciante of the Chili Peppers was a big one. He's pretty much the reason why I started playing in the first place. A friend of mine played bass, so we tried to be a Flea-and-John thing. Discovering Trey was big, and from there it went to Kevin Parker from Tame Impala. I love everybody who plays in Vulfpeck. Vampire Weekend is a great indie band. I like their guitar playing a lot.

Rick, how would you say the band changed after Peter joined?
MITAROTONDA Finding the right lineup is the single most important thing in a band. It's all about chemistry and like-mindedness and just "getting it." When Peter joined, he just got it. We clicked in a way that wasn't there with past lineups. We started singing harmonies, and our voices blended really well. I tried teaching harmonies and phrasing to other people, and it just didn't click. Peter latched onto the rhythmic language of the melodies. He got everything all at once. It was easy.

Do you feel that you play solos in a different way when he's playing guitar versus when he's playing keyboards?
MITAROTONDA Yeah, it definitely changes the palette of whatever's going on. As for the jams, the whole thing is a search for something interesting to chase down.

This is the first time you guys worked with an outside producer, D. James Goodwin. Did he kick your asses in a way that you hadn't experienced before?
ANSPACH He didn't really kick our asses; rather, he made things easier for us by being more of the decision maker. We felt better about the takes that we were doing, because we could let him decide which one was the best. It took a lot of stress out of the recording process.
MITAROTONDA The record prior to this one was of my own doing, and it was a tumultuous process. I liked handing the keys to somebody else who could allow me to just focus on the music.

ADAM BERTA

Was there a particular tune on the album that gave you a real fight in the studio? I know "Hot Tea" is quite different on record from how you've played it live.

MITAROTONDA I can't think of one. Adding to the previous question, I think James was pushing us out of our comfort zone. Personally speaking, our comfort zone had gotten uncomfortable.

That's a good line.

MITAROTONDA [*laughs*] Thanks. We were looking to be pushed. We wanted to subvert as much as we could about what we had already done, so his ideas about reinventing arrangements and the feel of songs was interesting. There were moments when it was like, "I don't know." But for the most part we felt, "Yeah, let's change. Let's flip everything on its head as much as we can."

Live, the band does great versions of cover tunes: Bill Withers' "Use Me," the Who's "My Generation," "Magic Carpet Ride" by Steppenwolf. How do you decide on a cover tune?

MITAROTONDA Humor is part of it. Some songs are just cool and we want to play them; others are just kind of hilarious but in a sweet way. It's like a joke, but an honest one. It's hard to explain. We can play an Elvis song, and to us it's funny, but at the same time, we love Elvis. The song "Escape" — you know, "The Piña Colada Song" — same deal. It's hilarious, but it's a great song.

We like to do fun things. Every once in a while, we'll play a soundtrack to a movie and we'll dress up like people from the film. We did an *Austin Powers* thing at one point. Other times we'll just learn random songs that we would never otherwise play, and we'll just have a great time. Certain songs just stick, like "Magic Carpet Ride."

Each of you seems to stick to one model of guitar. Rick, you're partial to a PRS Hollowbody.

MITAROTONDA I am. A long time ago, I tried out some PRS guitars, and I really liked them. At the time, Carlos Santana was one of the only guys playing PRS. I thought they looked and sounded great. My dad bought me one, and I loved it. A while later, I was looking through the PRS website and I saw the Hollowbody II. It seemed pretty sweet. I finally got one in 2012, and haven't really played anything else since.

Mitarotonda, Jeff Arevalo and Anspach perform at New York's Radio City Music Hall, June 24, 2022.

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC

Peter, you play a Suhr Mateus Asato Signature, right?

ANSPACH Yeah. What's funny is, I used to play a PRS Hollowbody II before I joined Goose. I loved it — it had great sustain. Then we started doing rehearsals for the *Dripfield* record, and I thought I needed something to differentiate my sound from Rick. Jeff has a Telecaster that I started to experiment with, and then I tried some Strats. I had heard Suhrs were great, so I got one, and I really liked it. It's got a humbucker in the bridge, which is a good balance between what I'm used to and more of a Strat sound. It's kind of a modern Strat build. I started playing it in the spring of 2021, and I haven't stopped.

So much has been changing for the group in recent years. You're already playing big theaters, and soon you could be an arena band. How are you changing or expanding your show and set as the venues increase in size?

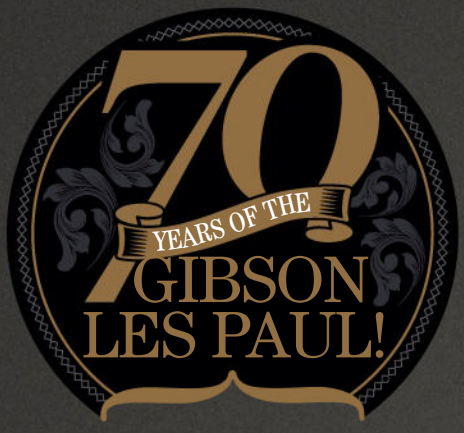
ANSPACH Hopefully, we'll just keep writing good songs that speak in those settings. If we play arenas, hopefully it'll sounds like we should be playing there. It's funny — sometimes you play big rooms, and it's as if playing less becomes more important. People need to hear everything you're doing.

So the bigger the places, the fewer the notes?

ANSPACH Definitely.

MITAROTONDA The whole thing is a process. I think our fans know that we need to roll with the punches and do the best we can as the rooms get bigger. It's exciting, but we need to feel comfortable. There was a point when playing to 1,000 people became uncomfortable and scary. Then it became comfortable.

And it's the same thing with 3,000-cap rooms. Now we're getting to a place where arenas feel okay. Last year, we played our first arena in Connecticut, and then we did some dates with Trey. By the end of it, it felt great — super comfortable. It's just a process.



SLASH

THE COLLECTION

He made his name with a 1959 replica Les Paul on Guns N' Roses' debut, *Appetite for Destruction*. Now, with hundreds of guitars in his collection, **Slash** selects the models he treasures most and traces their journeys through his career and hits.

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

ADAM BERTA

TOP: Slash and his 1956 Goldtop with P-90 pickups, serial number 6 1299. BELOW: The 1959 Standard in Darkburst, serial number 9 2225.

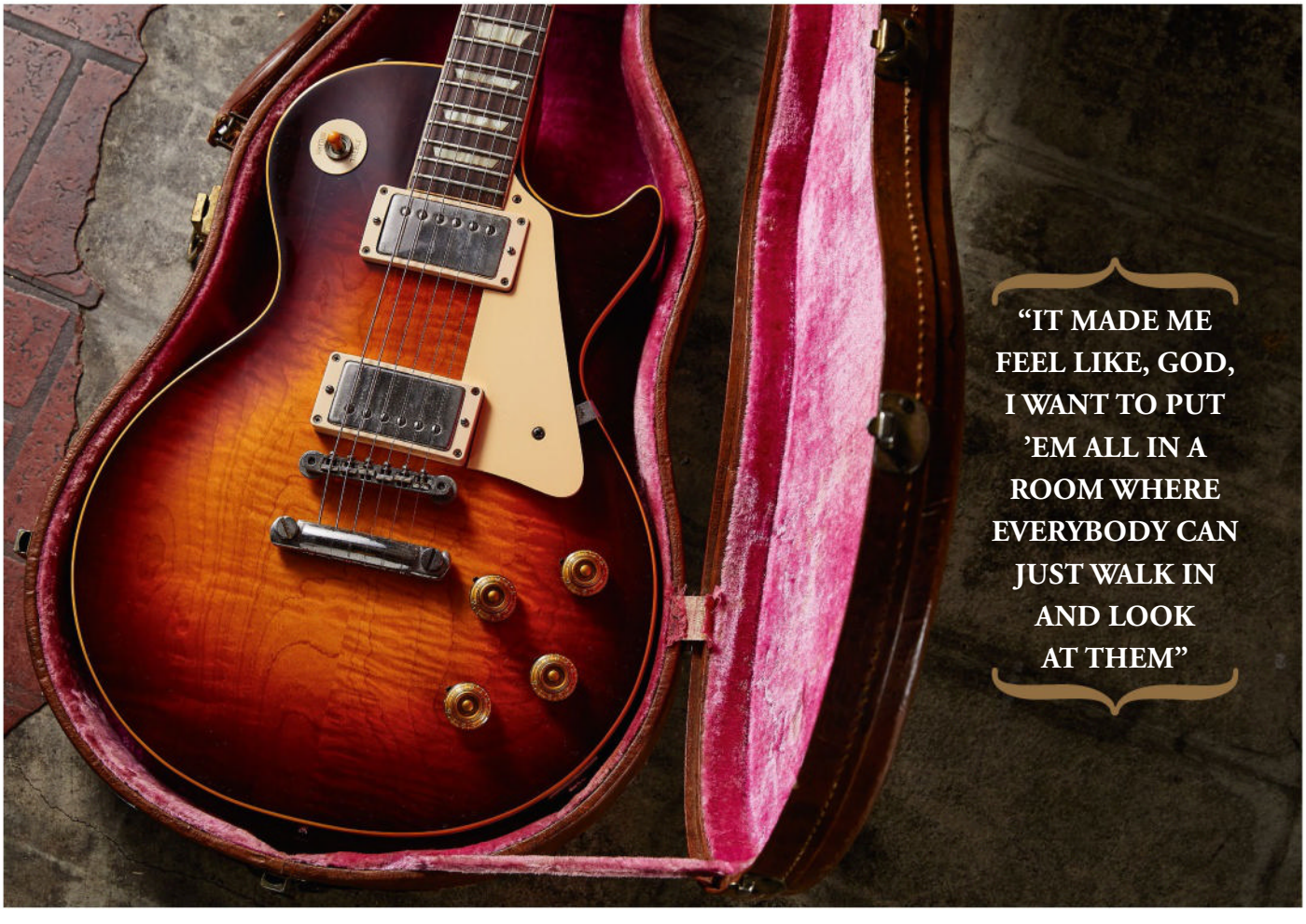
"Hi, my name's **Slash**. Can you sell me some Les Pauls?"

BACK IN 1988, that was how the man born Saul Hudson first came in contact with the Gibson guitar brand. Guns N' Roses had only recently released their debut effort, *Appetite for Destruction*, an album on which Slash, in what is now rock-guitar lore, recorded most of his parts using a 1959 Les Paul copy built by luthier Kris Derrig. As the band hit the road in support of the record, he took the Derrig with him. Not surprisingly, the axe, one of his only guitars at the time, quickly took a beating from intense onstage use. So Slash retired the Les Paul copy from live work and went looking for the real thing.

Which is what led him to Gibson.

"At that point, Guns N' Roses hadn't quite crested that wave. We were sort of still a fledgling L.A. club band that had a record deal, just like all the rest of 'em," Slash recalls. "But I called Gibson and they said, 'Yeah, we'll work something out.' They sold me two Les Pauls at dealer cost. And that's how our relationship started."

That relationship has grown into, arguably, the most visible and fruitful collaboration between an artist and guitar brand of the past 30-plus years. Slash has not only been instrumental in returning the Les Paul to unrivaled prominence in the guitar universe, he has also helped design some of the best-selling and most highly regarded artist models in the marketplace.



MITCH CONRAD

And the partnership has only gotten stronger and deeper with each year. In 2017, Gibson named Slash its first-ever Global Brand Ambassador, and today the Slash line of Gibson guitars continues to expand (see, for one, the signature J-45 acoustic offerings). What's more, the brand recently launched a record label, Gibson Records, which issued the 2022 Slash (featuring Myles Kennedy & the Conspirators) album, *4*, as its debut release.

Now, Slash has aligned with Gibson on another new venture — a massive, deluxe hardcover book, *The Collection: Slash*, which is the first offering from the newly created Gibson Publishing. Across its oversized 364 pages, Slash tells the stories behind the guitars he has used throughout his legendary career, all of them accompanied by gorgeously detailed photos of the instruments themselves. The premium coffee-table tome is a must-have for any guitar fan, and is available in standard, deluxe and a truly stunning, limited-to-500-copies Custom edition that is hand-signed by Slash and nestled inside a clamshell protective box with premium case candy.

In any iteration, *The Collection: Slash* is a package unlike any seen before. As for why the man himself wanted to do it? "I mean, what's better than a book full of guitars?" Slash asks with a laugh. "And the way Gibson proposed putting it together, I just thought it was so cool. It was an exciting prospect, and it just started from there."

In addition to chronicling dozens upon dozens of instruments from Slash's substantial stash (including, in a very cool move by Gibson, many quintessential non-Gibson models) compiling *The Collection: Slash* afforded the musician the opportunity to become reacquainted with some of the lesser-used six-strings in his life.

"I have to admit that I buy a lot of guitars," Slash says. "And I'm a little bit of a pack rat, because I've never gotten rid of anything. And while you're constantly aware of additional things that you keep adding to the stockpile, doing an exposé like this I realized that, while I play a lot of these guitars pretty regularly, some of them, they don't get enough use. It made me feel like, God, I want to put 'em all in a room where everybody can just walk in and look at them! Now, in a way, they can."

In the following pages, Slash takes us on a tour of some of the standout guitars in *The Collection: Slash*, recalling when each instrument came into his life and how it continues to be a part of his musical experience today.

TOP LEFT: One of the two korina Explorers Slash purchased with the 1959 Flying V serial number 9 1705 on page 46.
TOP RIGHT: A Les Paul Custom with a rosewood fingerboard instead of the classic ebony.
ABOVE: Slash with the 1959 Standard in Darkburst shown opposite.

ROSS HALFIN

Slash's most famous "Les Paul," the Derrig replica acquired its substantial wear in less than a year's time from heavy stage use.

KRIS DERRIG REPLICA

ONE OF THE most famous Les Pauls is not a Les Paul at all. Featured on almost all of *Appetite for Destruction* ("I played an SG on 'My Michelle,'" Slash reports), the Kris Derrig replica is the source of that album's coveted guitar tones, and arguably reignited the Les Paul flame single-handedly in the '80s. It also originally boasted Seymour Duncan Alnico II humbuckers, which were the template for Slash's signature pickups.

"Getting the Derrig was an interesting sort of perfect storm," Slash recalls. "Because I went from having no identifiable sound during the basic tracks for *Appetite* to getting this guitar, with these particular pickups, played through a particular rented Marshall amp. All those contributing factors made for a really great guitar sound that has served me ever since."

Amazingly, the heavy wear across the top and back is almost entirely the result of Slash using the guitar, then in pristine condition, onstage for less than a year. "I'm hard on my guitars," he admits. "And with the Derrig, I realized what an effect my live attack had on it. That's when I finally broke down and called Gibson and said, 'I need a Les Paul.' I just didn't want anything to happen to it. So I put it away."

"I JUST DIDN'T WANT ANYTHING TO HAPPEN TO IT. SO I PUT IT AWAY"

MITCH CONRAD

Slash's main stage guitar with Guns N' Roses and Velvet Revolver, Jessica gets a workout on *Appetite for Destruction* songs.

GIBSON LES PAUL "JESSICA"

WHEN WE THINK of Slash's Les Pauls, designs like the Derrig and his signature models come to mind. But it's likely another Les Paul, one he calls Jessica, that we've seen him wield most often. Slash acquired the guitar from Gibson — one of the two factory seconds with three-piece tops the company sent him after he retired the Derrig copy from road work. "It became my main stage guitar with Guns and through Velvet Revolver," he says. "It still is."

Onstage, he continues, "Jessica is the main *Appetite* guitar. I open the set with her for 'It's So Easy' and 'Brownstone,' I play 'Paradise City' with her, and I play 'Welcome to the Jungle' with her."

As for what makes the now heavily worn instrument stand apart from his many other Les Pauls? "The guitars that you take out on tour and play the most are the ones you feel most comfortable with, the ones that give you what you want from them, the ones that are consistent," he says. "Back then it was one of two guitars that I had for the road, so I made it work. And now it's a central part of what I do."

"IT WAS ONE OF TWO GUITARS I HAD FOR THE ROAD. NOW IT'S A CENTRAL PART OF WHAT I DO"

JIM DONNELLY

GIBSON LES PAUL "THE FIRST 'BURST" — 8 3096

> "THAT WAS THE BIGGER SELLING POINT FOR ME — IT HAS AMAZING TONE"

WHILE SLASH HAS always been adamant about the fact that he acquires guitars for their playability rather than pedigree, this Les Paul is one that offers both in equal measure. Dubbed "The First 'Burst," this Standard was one of two that left Gibson's factory on May 28, 1958 with 'Burst specifications, including PAF humbuckers and a Cherry Red finish. One of those instruments featured a three-piece top, while Slash's 'Burst is a two-piece with a slightly off-center join.

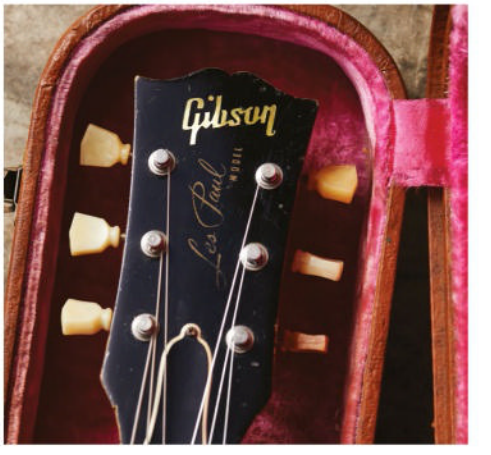
"It was definitely an acquisition because of what it is," Slash says of the First 'Burst. "But it's also a really great-sounding guitar. And that was the bigger selling point for me — it has amazing tone."

So much so that Slash has used the historic guitar in the studio, specifically, on the Conspirators' 2014 album, *World on Fire*, which was recorded not long after he acquired the instrument. That said, he adds, "I wouldn't take it on the road." For that, he continues, "Gibson made me a replica, which sounds really great as well."

This guitar was one of two that left Gibson's factory on May 28, 1958 with 'Burst specifications.

MITCH CONRAD

This was the first of several ’59 ’Bursts that Slash acquired. “The PAF pickups just sound so sincere,” he says.



1959 LES PAUL STANDARD — 9 0844

THESE DAYS, SLASH owns several authentic ’59 ’Bursts. But this one, acquired in the early 1990s, was his first, and it remains his favorite. “It has a particular sound that I’m drawn to, a certain kind of attack and personality that I recognize,” he says. “It’s the go-to ’59 for me because I know what it does.”

In addition to sporting a gorgeous finish, the guitar is easily identifiable via a telltale “snakebite” — small holes in its top that evidence the one-time addition of a Bigsby vibrato. And while Slash keeps it away from the stage, he says he has used it in the studio with the Conspirators on several occasions, in particular the ballad “The Great Pretender,” from 2016’s *Living the Dream*, and the band’s cover of Elton John’s “Rocket Man.”

“The PAF pickups just sound so sincere,” Slash says. “The guitar is much different from, say, the Derrig, which is a much more modern-sounding Les Paul — it’s louder, it’s got more attack. If you do like a slow blues thing or anything like that, the tonality on this particular ’59 is really great for that kind of stuff.”

“IT’S THE GO-TO ’59 FOR ME BECAUSE I KNOW WHAT IT DOES”

MITCH CONRAD

The guitar that launched Slash and Gibson's partnership: "This is when I think of us as going into business together."

2002 SLASH LES PAUL PROTOTYPE

THIS LIMITED-RUN Custom Shop guitar is "what I would call the first 'official' Slash model," Slash reveals. "This is when I think of us as going into business together for real, and when Gibson started to actually have this idea of me sitting down and designing a guitar with them and then putting it into production."

The 2002 Slash Les Paul boasts a rich Tobacco Burst finish and Seymour Duncan Alnico II humbuckers, as well as a custom "Slash" truss-rod cover. But the most unique aspect is undoubtedly the inclusion of a piezo pickup system that offers a selection of acoustic and hybrid acoustic/electric sounds, controlled via a three-position mini-toggle switch between the guitar's volume knobs.

"I did use the piezo for a second, and it actually sounded really good," Slash says. "But my physical approach to an acoustic sound didn't work on electric guitar — I hit it too hard when I'm playing acoustic stuff, so doing it on electric was not really conducive to that sort of attack. So eventually I phased it out. But it was a cool idea at the time."

"I DID USE THE PIEZO FOR A SECOND, AND IT ACTUALLY SOUNDED REALLY GOOD"

ROSS HALFIN

> "I CHERISH THAT I'VE MANAGED TO KEEP IT"

Slash was gifted the guitar from the parents of a child he used to babysit while he was still in high school.

ROSS HAALFIN

EARLY 1970S EPIPHONE 6830

THIS JAPANESE-MADE steel-string acoustic isn't the oldest guitar in Slash's collection, but it is the one he's had the longest. "I think I was probably in high school when I got it," he says. "And I cherish the fact that I've managed to keep it and nothing's happened to it."

Slash calls the Epiphone the first "good acoustic" he ever took ownership of, and he received it in a moment of goodwill. "When I was 15, I would do some babysitting, and this one kid I babysat for, his parents had it hanging on the wall next to a mandolin," he recalls. "I asked them, 'Can I play it while the kid's sleeping?' I was still playing it when they got home, and they actually ended up giving it to me."

These days, the Epiphone is far removed from all-night strum sessions. "I haven't pulled it out and played it in a long time, because the tailpiece is threatening to come off and I had to bolt it down," Slash says. "So I just sort of leave it alone. It's more of a keepsake than anything." He laughs. "Besides, I have plenty of acoustic guitars to beat on. I don't need to beat on that one."

1959 GIBSON FLYING V — 9 1705

"THEY HAVE THIS SMOOTH, SWEET TONE THAT YOU CANNOT FIND IN ANY OTHER GUITAR"

"WHEN I WAS DOING the *Use Your Illusion* records I was looking for different guitars for different songs, and it was the first time I ever had any money to do that," Slash recalls. "I became aware of the korina '58s and '59s, and so I went to my friend who is a guitar broker. He came up with two Explorers and this V, and I bought all three. It was one of those purchases where I was like, 'Well, let's see how these sound.' And it was, 'Oh, this is fucking awesome!'"

For fans looking to hear that sound, tune your ears to Guns N' Roses' cover of Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door." "I went to the studio, that guitar was there, and I laid all the tracks down in a couple of hours," Slash says. "The tone on it was so great that it was literally a one-take solo — just a throw-and-go. That guitar, because of the way it sounded, is what led that to be such an easy thing to do."

As for what he thinks is so special about those original Vs? "They just have a certain tonal quality, this smooth, sweet tone that you cannot find in any other guitar," Slash says.

This *Use Your Illusion* find marked the first time that Slash had the money for vintage guitar purchases.

MITCH CONRAD

Slash makes good use of the whammy bar. The onboard preamp, Varitone switching and coil splits? Not so much.

1980 BC RICH MOCKINGBIRD

AS A TEENAGER, Slash chose a B.C. Rich to be the first "good, brand-name instrument" he ever owned. He has a variety of examples, the most recognizable of which is this red 1980 Mockingbird, which he famously employed in the studio and the music video for the *Use Your Illusion* track "You Could Be Mine," as well as on Velvet Revolver songs like "Sucker Train Blues."

"This is the one guitar that I have a photographic memory of acquiring," Slash says. "I bought it from a guy in front of [*defunct L.A. nightclub*] the Cathouse. I hardly knew him, but I saw him regularly every Tuesday night when I would go down there. He told me he had a Mockingbird that he was looking to sell, and he goes, 'I'll bring it down.' And the following Tuesday at, like, 11:30 at night, he comes walking down Highland Avenue with a guitar case. I bought it from him on the sidewalk."

While the guitar is one that Slash will often reach for when he's in need of a whammy bar, some of the Mockingbird's unique appointments — an onboard preamp, Varitone switching, coil splits — are roundly ignored. "The knobs are a cool novelty-type of thing, but I've never found much use for them," he says. "I was never one of those 'coil-tappers.'"

"THIS IS THE ONE GUITAR THAT I HAVE A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY OF ACQUIRING"

JIM DONNELLY/ROSS HALFIN

GOLD RUSH

Gibson archivist **Mat Koehler** traces the first 10 years of the Les Paul's history, in which it transformed from an elegant jazz guitar to the weapon of choice for the 1960s' rock and roll revolution.

BY JAMIE DICKSON

AS SENIOR DIRECTOR of product development at Gibson, Mat Koehler is behind the company's drive for maximum vintage authenticity in its reissues, from Epiphone Coronets to Custom Color Firebirds. But the Les Paul — and the man who put his moniker on one of the most iconic electrics of all time — was the guitar that sparked his interest in working for the Nashville company and it remains one of his ruling passions.

"I'm from Waukesha, Wisconsin, Les Paul's hometown," Koehler says, "so the name Les Paul has always been legendary to me. My uncle had a music store there called White House of Music and you'd always hear whispers that 'Les Paul's in town.' I was always around guitars, but the Les Paul had the mystique and that led to me wanting to to work for Gibson. So yeah, in a way, it means everything to me."

With this thought to conjure with, we sit down with Mat to get his forensic view on the large and small transitions the model made in its earliest years, including the anomalies and one-offs thrown up by the breakneck speed of change as the rock and roll era took off.

What's your take on the early years of the Les Paul Model? It saw quite a few revisions in short order.

First, I should say that it wasn't just Les Pauls that were constantly evolving in the 1950s and 60s — it was everything. Gibson really had this model-year mentality where they wanted to add features and benefits and make changes. And if something was selling well and working well, normally it would stay in the line for a little bit longer, but even then they were trying to stay ahead of the curve. They had a lot of competition at the time because this was the guitar boom era.

So in the '50s, the first version is the trapeze tailpiece. Famously, the strings are wrapped around the opposite of how Les Paul had wanted. So because Les Paul wanted to palm mute, and they did not execute it that way, it took them a full year and a half to fix it. The good news is, in that time, Ted McCarty had created an amazing solution: the McCarty bridge, the stop-bar bridge, which is still one of my favorites. It's not the best for intonation, which is why it evolved further, but it has a really specific sound and grit to it. And then you got the ABR-1 that first debuts on the Les Paul Custom in 1954 — in late '53, actually — and then it applies to the regular Les Paul, the Goldtop model in 1955. And then pretty much the Les Paul, as we know it today, was born. That's the evolution, outside of humbuckers being introduced in 1957. Those are the three steps to the current ABR and stopbar setup we see today.

With so many changes in the space of a decade, you do hear of a fair few examples of one-off guitars surviving that have features you wouldn't normally associate with a given year.

Yeah, I had a vintage guitar business before I joined Gibson, so I would see a lot of those anomalies, but I wasn't able to put them into context. Working at Gibson and working for a long time with the Custom Shop and Gibson Memphis, just being present in the factory setting, you completely understand some of these mysteries. Like I completely understand how a Goldtop could have been shipped in '59. It probably was held back, possibly in the repair department, and shipped later; or they found it, they serialized it and just shipped it out. Rule number one of businesses is "stuff going out the door," so Gibson always wanted

"EVERYTHING WAS CONSTANTLY EVOLVING AT GIBSON IN THE 1950S AND '60S. THEY WANTED TO STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE"

Les Paul's Number One, or first approved prototype of the Les Paul Model. Ever the tinkerer, Les added many subsequent mods of his own.

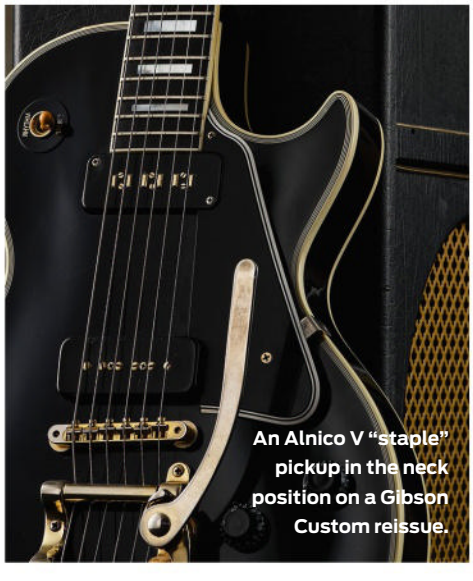
JUSTIN BORUCKI

to have things going out the door, even if they were older, repaired or repurposed.

I've seen wrap-tail models as late as early '57. So there are some odd ones. Then there are the other anomalies, such as unique colors, which I'm really interested in. I have a mini custom-color collection. No Les Pauls, unfortunately! The whole gist of it is that the factory setting is unpredictable. And that's why you see anomalies.

One of the big changes to the Les Paul was the introduction of the sunburst-finish models in 1958. Why did the Goldtop get the push?

Honestly, it's about factory context. I think they wanted to get out of the gold paint business because metallic paint is tough to work with. There's a lot of trash in the air from the metallic finish, and they were like, "Can we get away from metallic here, please?" It took them a while to settle on the Cherry Sunburst as we know it today. They did try a [*completely*] Cherry Red guitar very early on before there was a Cherry Sunburst, and there were maybe two of those, if I remember rightly. Then there was a really unique guitar that I've seen personally, that is in the ledger book. It almost looks like a hand-stained sunburst, though it's more of an amber sunburst. It's front and back sunburst with a tortoiseshell pickguard — really unusual, but it's real and it's legit. I'm just not allowed to share where it's at. [*laughs*] That tells me they were experimenting with a few different finishes before they landed on Cherry Sunburst, but then when it debuted in *The Gibson Gazette* [*the company's magazine from this period*], they lead with "a beautiful cherry sunburst is the news for the Les Paul…" so they clearly were trying to hone in on something that they thought would hit.



An Alnico V "staple" pickup in the neck position on a Gibson Custom reissue.

"IN THAT EVOLUTION OF '58 THROUGH 1960, IT WAS REALLY JUST MINUTE CHANGES THAT NOW ARE CELEBRATED AS GREAT DIFFERENCES"

The irony, of course, is that it didn't really hit it. They didn't sell as many Sunbursts as they did Goldtops. Then, in that evolution of '58 through 1960, it was really just minute changes to the guitars that now are celebrated as great differences. We're talking about bigger frets; occasionally, you'll see flamier tops in '59. And then in 1960, they wanted to get rid of the fading aniline-dye finish on the top. So by mid 1960 they had introduced a new kind of tangerine-orange sunburst [*a.k.a. "tomato soup" finish*]. That's really the gist of it, though thinner neck profiles and some of the hardware changes were instituted across the board, such as the reflector knobs in 1960, the double-ring tuners. Not a whole lot of differences under the hood, though. Same construction and pickups.

You mentioned the ledger books, but the record is incomplete. How do you go about authenticating 'Bursts for which official records no longer exist?

There are only a few Les Pauls in our 1958 [*ledger*] book. And, unfortunately, the time at which the Sunburst was debuted was also the same time period when the Explorer first shipped. That's exactly where that ledger book ends. May 31 is the last day in the ledger book, and then it's just blank, so that tells me either they moved to a different accounting system or ledger system, or they had already started another book and they were just tagging on.

But it's still a great mystery what happened to those records. They definitely existed, but there's this gap between mid-'58 through 1960, and then it starts again in 1961. Clearly, there must have been some intention to keep records for that time period. I don't know if it was malicious… we're actually still recovering parts of our archive today. And oftentimes, they're just in some little old lady's garage, so it's very possible that they're out there and that they will be recovered, I feel.

But as far as verifying Les Pauls goes, the ledger book itself is not a huge help with any of that. With some Les Pauls from '58 through 1960, you really, really have to know the "tells" [*unmistakable signs of genuine authenticity*].

Just for illustrative purposes, what might one or two of those "tells" be?

I'm not sure I'm willing to give that up. But generally speaking, you want to hone in on completely benign elements of the guitar that most people would not think to look at. A lot of people are looking at the top carve and the neck profile, but those are things that changed day to day in the factory. You want to look for something that would be consistent on those originals that is fairly [*mundane*] and then hone in on that — compare, compare, compare, see how it evolved. The more access to Les Pauls you have, the better. Fortunately, when I had my previous business, one of my best customers was Joe Bonamassa, who was very friendly sharing his guitars with me. That was great.

Moving on to the Les Paul Custom, it seems almost a shame that, though an icon in its own right, it's been in the shade of the 'Bursts.

Yeah, clearly at the time they debuted, it was the one that Les Paul bonded with. The irony is he had specifically requested a maple cap on the Les Paul, and then by

ADAM GASSON

LATTER-DAY LESTERS

The development of the Les Paul after the 1970s may have been less radical, but it, too, has its landmarks. Here are three notable ones.

Les Paul Heritage 80 Series

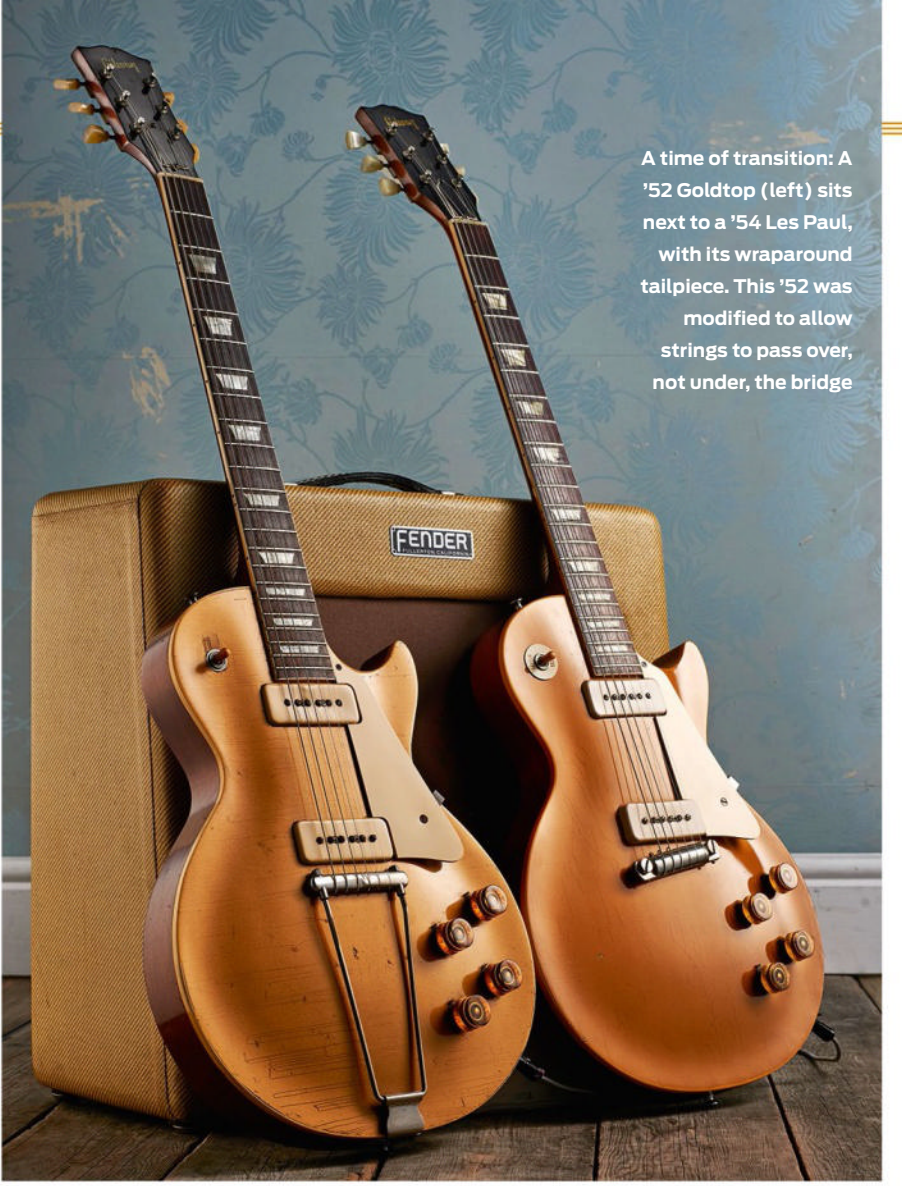
One of the earliest attempts by Gibson to faithfully replicate the celebrated 1959 Les Paul Standard was the Heritage 80 Standard. Introduced, as the name suggests, in 1980, it was made in three variants, with increasingly fancy appointments: the Standard 80, the Standard 80 Elite, and the rare (around 50 were made) Standard 80 Award, which featured gold hardware and a richly figured Cherryburst maple top. Though designed to be accurate reissues, the outline and geometry of the cutaway and body differed slightly from originals. The series was discontinued in 1983.

Les Paul Studio

Spotting a gap in the market for a U.S.-made Les Paul at a more affordable price, Gibson debuted its Les Paul Studio in 1983. Featuring a one-piece mahogany body with single-ply binding, maple neck and three-piece maple top, the Studio Standard was low on frills but, perhaps incongruously, featured an ebony fretboard. A Custom version was released at the same time and featured a mahogany neck and body and multi-ply binding on the top edge of the body only, with single-ply elsewhere. The Studio has proven one of the most popular and adaptable guitars in Gibson's line-up, undergoing many changes and variants.

Les Paul Axcess

When the modern rock era arrived, Gibson struggled to find the right way to address a shred-oriented trend in guitar design that tended to favor Strat-derived solidbodies. New designs such as the SuperStrat-style U2 and idiosyncratic M-III failed to get a serious foothold on the ultra-playable electric market, so in 2008 Gibson turned its attention to adapting its flagship Les Paul, introducing a heel that blended seamlessly with the body, a belly carve for comfort and an extensively chambered body for weight relief. The addition of a Floyd Rose completed the model's migration into modern shred territory.



A time of transition: A '52 Goldtop (left) sits next to a '54 Les Paul, with its wraparound tailpiece. This '52 was modified to allow strings to pass over, not under, the bridge

the time they made the Les Paul Customs in the '50s, they were solid mahogany. I'm not actually sure if Les Paul knew that or not. But the ebony fingerboard makes up for that a bit, gives some of that brightness.

So yeah, the Custom was the first model to debut the ABR, which is kind of cool, in 1953. And their evolution with the staple pickups was a whole different vibe with the tiny, tiny frets. Everything was designed around fast play. There was a lower-action spec, too, on that model, which a lot of people don't know. Out of the factory they were supposed to have an extremely low action as well as the small frets.

So the Customs were really tuned into Les Paul's tastes, even more than the Les Paul "regular," which is what I call anything that has gold paint. Even when it transitioned into the SG shape, you see Mary Ford and Les Paul playing the SG Custom with the Les Paul name on it, so he definitely was drawn to those tuxedo appointments. And he was a sharp dresser, so it's no wonder.

The Alnico V "staple" pickup used in the neck position of the earliest Les Paul Customs is having a bit of resurgence on a few boutique electrics. Why did it only appear briefly on the Custom?

Again, factory context. I now understand that they're very difficult to build. It's part of the reason we're redeveloping the staple pickup to be more factory-friendly. The design itself was a little crude. We have Seth Lover's original drawings and you can tell that this wasn't his instinctual way to create a pickup. This was Les Paul in his ear saying, "This is what you should do." But it does serve a purpose, and it has a fantastic jazz tone, which is why you see it on archtop models. I think, really, the reason that it wasn't more prevalent is just because of the difficulty to construct it.

LP EVOLUTION

We chart the key changes the Les Paul and its variants went through in its seminal years, from 1952 to 1978.

BY JAMIE DICKSON

1952

LES PAUL MODEL launched. Multi-section maple top, mahogany body and neck. Gold-finished top (a few had gold back and sides also), twin soapbar P-90s, trapeze tailpiece. Shallow-angle neck-set means strings have to wrap under bridge, preventing palm muting, to make setup geometry work, turning a good bridge design into a flawed one. Shallow neck-set also made later conversion to stopbar tailpiece or Tune-o-matic problematic. Single-ply cream binding, though very earliest models omit neck binding. Single-ring Kluson tuners with no brand name. Tall "barrel" control knobs. Silk-screened Les Paul Model logo on headstock.

1953

GOLDTOP LES PAUL upgraded with single-piece wrapover bridge and new raked-back neck-set geometry, with trapeze tailpiece discontinued, although some guitars produced in early '53 still made to 1952 spec. Neck-set angle increases slightly up to 1954. Serial number on reverse of headstock. Gold "barrel" control knobs reduced in height.

[2]

[1]

1954

LES PAUL CUSTOM launched with mahogany carved top, neck and body. Alnico V pickup at neck and P-90 at bridge, black covers. First appearance of ABR-1 bridge. Low "fretless wonder" frets, bound ebony fretboard. Black finish and multi-ply binding, gold-plated hardware, split-diamond inlay on headstock.

LES PAUL JUNIOR makes its debut. Single-cut, slab mahogany body, 24.75-inch scale and one P-90. Two-color sunburst finish.

LES PAUL TV model is introduced: essentially a yellow-finish Junior but very early models had maple body and ¾-size scale length.

[1] The shallow neck-set of the earliest Les Pauls led to usability problems with the trapeze tailpiece.

[2] The simple wrapover bridge introduced in 1953 wasn't easy to intonate and was superseded by the ABR-1 in '55.

[3] It looks rock-focused, but the three-pickup Les Paul Custom, was marketed as a modern jazz guitar when introduced in 1957.

1955

ADJUSTABLE ABR-1 BRIDGE replaced wrapover bridge on goldtop Les Paul Model in autumn. Gibson logo moved up headstock. Control knobs changed to familiar "top hat" shape with curved sides.

LES PAUL TV model increased to 24.75-inch scale. Mahogany body from late '55.

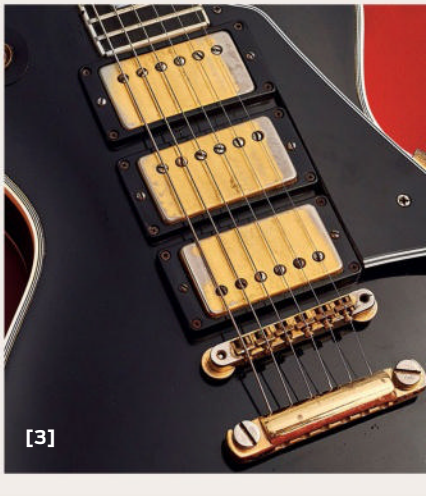
LES PAUL SPECIAL launched featuring a mahogany body and neck, two soapbar P-90s, rosewood 'board and wrapover bridge. Available in TV Yellow.

1956

SPRAGUE 'BUMBLE BEE' capacitors replaced earlier Sprague "Grey Tiger" caps in wiring looms of goldtop Les Paul Model.

LES PAUL JUNIOR pickup moved forward slightly to stand clear of bridge posts.

1957

HUMBUCKING PATENT APPLIED FOR (PAF) pickups replaced P-90s on Les Paul Model, with DC resistance typically within 7 to 9 kohms. Some built with dark back and sides finish (and yellow serial for legibility), but the majority have natural mahogany finish back and sides. Earliest PAFs fitted to goldtops

[3]

feature stainless-steel covers before move to nickel-plated. Early humbucking Les Pauls feature black plastic parts, including M-69 pickup rings, pickguard and so on (typically with matching black back and sides on the guitar), soon replaced by cream plastics.

LES PAUL CUSTOM switched to three humbucking pickups.

1958

SUNBURST-FINISH LES PAUL Standard introduced and name changed from Les Paul Model. Two-piece, center-seam maple top, cherry-tint back and sides. Cherry Sunburst finish has a more vibrant red tint than 1959 examples. About 15 percent were made with notably figured tops and around the same proportion were factory fitted with Bigsby B-7 vibrato.

LES PAUL JUNIOR body changes to rounded, double-cutaway design (as does TV Model). Pickguard now tortoiseshell. Cherry finish.

1959

FRET SIZE INCREASED on Les Paul Standard, neck profile slightly less chubby than 1958 examples, red of sunburst subtler. Some examples in Tobacco Sunburst made. Pickup bobbins white or "zebra," though if the latter the bobbin with adjustable poles always black. Square-cornered jack plate fitted, along with small changes to plastics, including ring around pickup selector, which becomes thinner, with different font.

LES PAUL CUSTOM fitted with Grover Rotomatic tuners.

1960

SUNBURST FINISH CHANGED due to introduction of new red dyes less sensitive to light damage, assuming a now-famous "tomato soup" hue. Control knobs changed to "reflector" type with metal cap, replacing the earlier top-hat knobs with clear plastic tops. Neck profile gets slimmer. White bobbins on pickups phased out. Note, the earliest 1960 Les Pauls were built to same spec as 1959 examples.

[4]

1961

MODEL CHANGED COMPLETELY to Les Paul/SG–type double-cut design featuring thin mahogany body and beveled edges plus "sideways" Vibrola. Les Paul's name still on truss-rod cover.

LES PAUL CUSTOM line also changed to SG-style body with white finish.

1963

LES PAUL STANDARD model discontinued, and the SG-style Les Paul Standard simply became the SG Standard.

1968

SINGLE-CUT LES PAUL Standard model reintroduced as a reissue of the 1956-spec P-90 goldtop, with numerous alterations. Metal parts now chrome instead of nickel-plated, fingerboard Indian rosewood not Brazilian, serial number stamped not inked on headstock reverse. Sprague "Black Beauty" or brown-disc capacitors.

LES PAUL CUSTOM also reintroduced with two humbucking pickups, "amplifier"-style control knobs, shallower headstock back angle (14 degrees instead of 17 degrees),

[4] 1958 Les Paul Standards, such as this beautiful example belonging to the Seven Decades collection, rarely had figured tops.

[5] The Les Paul Deluxe was a marriage of convenience between the classic single-cut body and a surplus stock of Epiphone pickups. But its sound helped define 1970s rock music.

[5]

maple top on mahogany body and long-tenon neck joint.

1969

LES PAUL DELUXE introduced. Features four-piece "pancake" body construction comprising a maple top, a thick upper section of mahogany, a thin layer of maple and a thick lower section of mahogany. Two mini-humbuckers instead of P-90s, goldtop finish. Three-piece mahogany neck with volute.

LES PAUL CUSTOM also received "pancake" body construction and three-piece maple neck with volute.

LES PAUL STANDARD reissued in 1954 spec, with wraparound tailpiece and two P-90s with "Gibson" on the covers. No volute.

1971

LES PAUL DELUXE offered in Cherry Sunburst and Cherry Red.

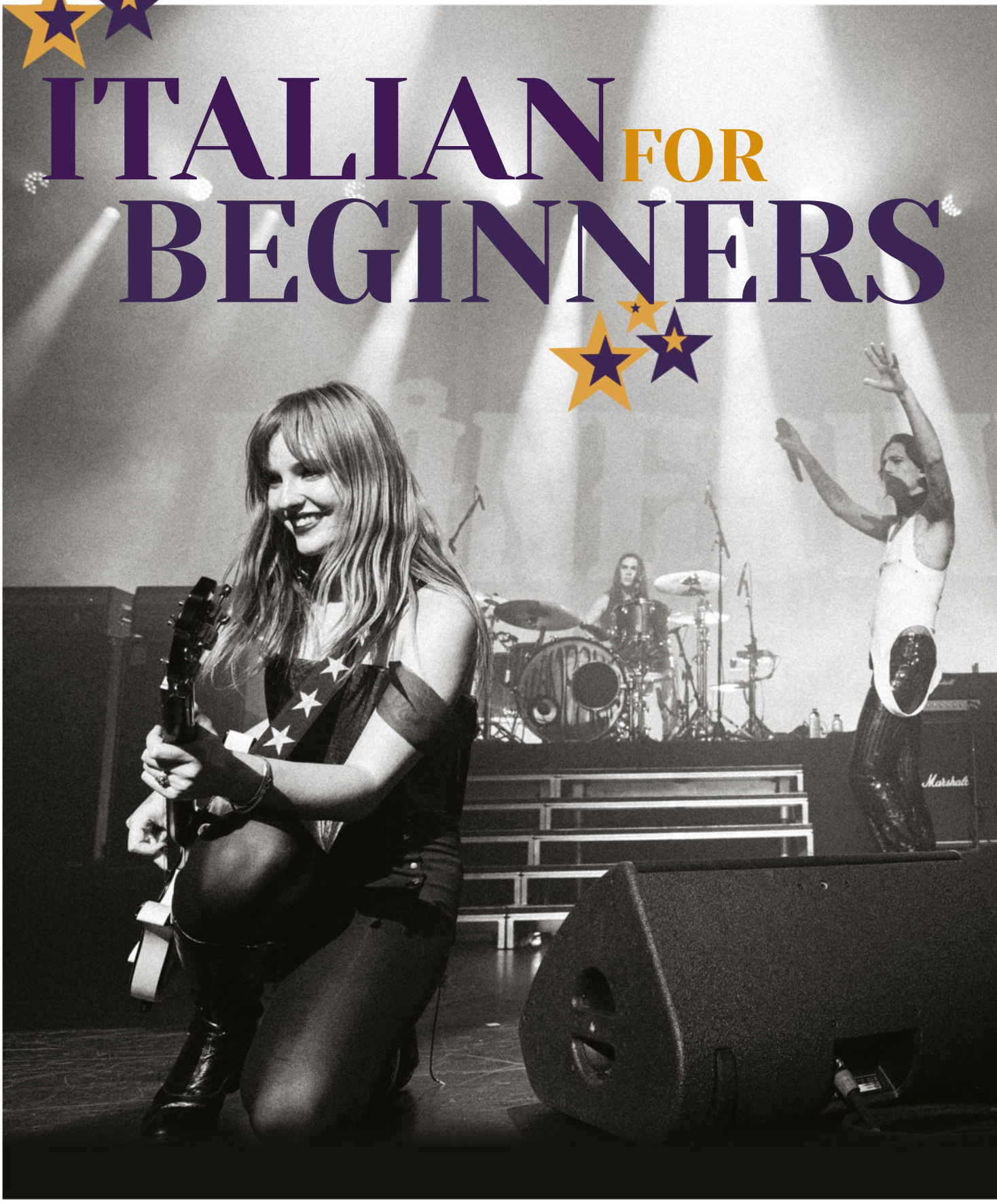
1976

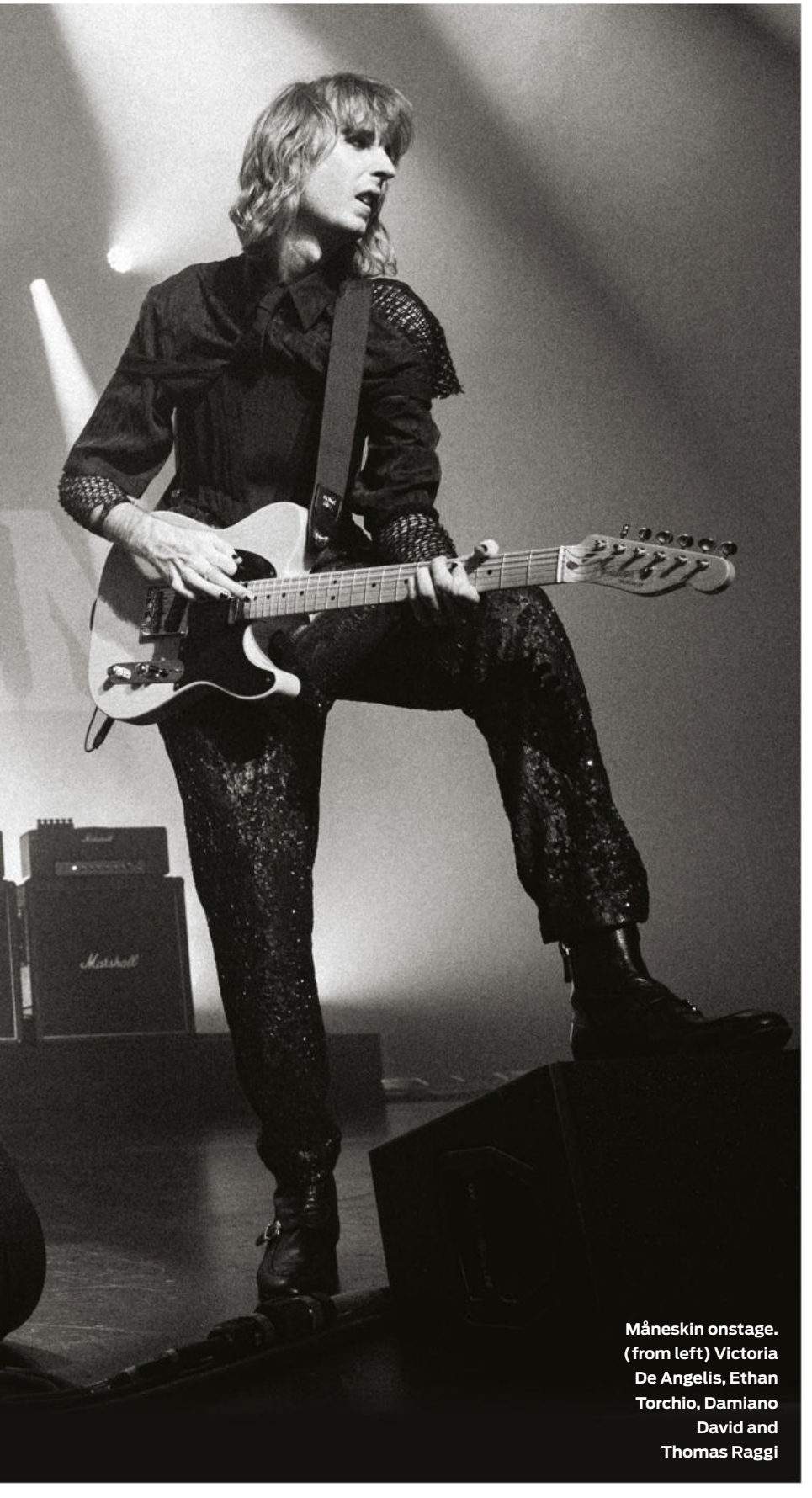
LES PAUL STANDARD built with four-piece pancake construction (maple/mahogany/maple/mahogany), three-piece maple top, two humbuckers, Tune-o-matic bridge. Offered in Wine Red, Natural, Tobacco Sunburst and Cherry Sunburst finishes.

1978

TWO-PIECE BODY WITH maple top. Goldtop finish now also available.

ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS





Måneskin onstage. (from left) Victoria De Angelis, Ethan Torchio, Damiano David and Thomas Raggi

They've sold millions of records in Europe and the U.K. With *Rush!*, Rome's **Måneskin** are introducing American ears to their infectious brand of glam-rock revivalism.

BY JOE BOSSO

SOME BANDS JUST have that magical, elusive "it" factor. Take Italy's Måneskin. From the minute the Rome-based group appeared on the popular Eurovision Song Contest in 2021 and tore the stage apart with their riffy, rap-rock knockout "Zitti e Buoni," audiences embraced this dynamic, unapologetically provocative and unbelievably charismatic foursome as the genuine article. Lead singer Damiano David prowled the stage like a feral jungle cat, and guitarist Thomas Raggi tossed out fireball shrieks, snaggletooth rhythms and blasts of sinuous leads, all while bassist Victoria De Angelis and drummer Ethan Torchio attacked their instruments with fury.

And just as quickly, and just as predictably, writers seized on Måneskin — pronounced MOAN-eh-skin (it means *midnight* in Danish) — and anointed them the new "saviors of rock 'n' roll." It's a heavy cross to bear, but from all appearances, the band seems to be taking it all in stride.

"The idea of 'saving rock' is a pretty big goal to put on ourselves," De Angelis says. "We really try not to think about that kind of thing. To us, rock music is a vehicle to express ourselves and to have fun — I think it's always been that. And that's what we do. We have a really good time when we play. I think the biggest thing we have going is, we try not to fit inside any kind of current

mainstream format, because then we would be inauthentic. It would be fake."

Raggi agrees, but he also suggests Måneskin could have a more significant and lasting impact on their young fans. "It's not lost on us that a lot of people our age aren't playing instruments like they used to," he says. "If we can inspire them to play real instruments, that would be great. Maybe they see us on TV or onstage, jumping around and having fun playing our instruments, and they might think, Hey, I want to do that. I want to buy a guitar. I want to play bass. I think that's important."

De Angelis quickly picks up on that thought. "I think it's already happening," she offers. "I see these videos of kids playing covers of our songs, and they'll have the exact same bass that I play or the same guitar that Thomas uses."

Måneskin are an ambitious lot, and thus far, all of their moves are paying off in dividends. They scored a worldwide hit with the raunchy ripper "I Wanna Be Your Slave," and their super-charged cover of the Four Seasons' "Beggin'" was an unlikely smash, dominating airwaves — particularly in the U.S. — in 2022. As a live outfit, they've stolen the show at festivals like Lollapalooza and Coachella, slam-dunked appearances on *Saturday Night Live* and other late-night TV shows, and in perhaps one of the true tests for any band, they proved that they could win over a Rolling Stones stadium crowd.

Raggi plays his Custom Shop '63 Fender Strat with a heavily aged Red Sparkle finish.

The group's recently released third album, *Rush!* (Epic), looks poised to propel their fame to even greater heights. With the exception of three tracks, the songs are sung in English, and there's not a piker to be found among the 17 cuts. Growing musically while under the white-hot spotlights of sudden celebrity is a tough operation, but Måneskin have pulled it off. Hook-filled arena stompers like "Baby Said" and "Gasoline" roar with guitar crunch, and even a big-time power ballad like "Timezone" delivers poignancy with nary an ounce of treacle. As a soloist, Raggi plays to the song, filling spaces with economical but effective bursts of shred, but on the dramatic album closer "The Loneliest" he stretches out for a squealing and screaming lead. For added guitar goodness, none other than Tom Morello turns up on the bruising single "Gossip" for not one but two solos.

> "WORKING WITH TOM MORELLO WAS REFRESHING. HE HAD THE SAME APPROACH AS US — 'LET'S JAM!'"

Going into the recording of *Rush!*, Måneskin knew they had to come up with a winner, and to that end they enlisted Swedish hooks god Max Martin (known for his work with non-rockers Britney Spears and Taylor Swift, among others) to pump up the ear-candy factor without defanging any of the punch. All in all, the band wrote some 50 songs during a three-month period late last year before whacking them down to a manageable bunch.

"It was crazy," DeAngelis says. "For a while we wrote two songs a day. We didn't want to close the door on any ideas, so we just said, 'We'll keep writing, and at the end of these three months we'll look at what we've got.' The selection process was difficult because we're four people with different tastes, but I also think that our differences gave us a more interesting record."

Adds Raggi, "In the end, we acted very democratically. Each member got to choose a group of songs, so we all feel equally represented. I think the album is a really good representation of who we are and what we're all about."

You guys seem to be doing everything right. None of this is by accident, of course — there's got to be some kind of plan to it. How do you and your manager devise a strategy?

VICTORIA DE ANGELIS There's a plan to it, yes, but we try to be guided by the music. Sure, we sit down and look at the places we're playing and the opportunities we have, but nothing happens without the music.

THOMAS RAGGI That's how it really started. When we won the Eurovision Song Contest, we stuck out because we played rock music. It's the genre that we like, and that's the choice we made. When we started out, we played more soul and reggae stuff, more pop songs, but we love to rock out.

You're playing bigger and bigger places. Have the changes in venue size affected your musicianship?

DE ANGELIS We haven't really been able to think about it. Of course, when we're playing bigger places, we have to try to reach people who are far away, but I still feel like I did when we were playing the clubs. I want to get down with the crowd. [*laughs*] That's harder to do when there's 15,000 people, but we try not to let the musicianship suffer, even though we have to put on a bigger show now.

Do you find it harder to get your sound on bigger stages?

De Angelis favors a Danelectro Longhorn bass. "That bass is me," she says.

DE ANGELIS With bigger places, there can be more echo inside the venue. If a stage is bigger, you might move around more and you don't hear yourself like if you were in a smaller club.

RAGGI Sometimes it's hard to get the sound you like, but we do our best. As a guitarist, I have to be aware of where my pedals are set up. If I move around too much, I have to make sure I can get back to the pedals at the right time in a song. It's something I'm getting used to.

Tom Morello has made it known online how much he loves your band. What was it like working with him on the track "Gossip"?

RAGGI It was sick, man. He's so cool and super sweet. He came in and jammed with us, and that was awesome. You know, we grew up hearing him and Rage, so when he came in there was a bit of nervousness — "What's he going to be like?" But he couldn't have been nicer. Watching him play, the way he gets his sounds... It was wild.

DE ANGELIS What was really great was doing it with him in person. A lot of times, your label might say, "You should have this person or that person on your song," but you don't even get to meet them. They might send a verse over on a file or something. That's bullshit, you know? Two artists collaborating should be genuine, and you can only get that when you're together. Working with Tom was refreshing. He had the same approach as us — "Let's jam!"

Thomas, you've talked about how much John Frusciante has influenced you. On the song "Timezone," you play a slippery, arpeggiated intro that almost sounds like you're channeling him.

RAGGI Oh, absolutely. Whenever I play clean arpeggios, I think I'm taking inspiration from John Frusciante. The way he mixes arpeggios and little lead parts is incredible. There's always something new happening each time he starts the phrase over. He's the best at that. He's always been one of my top guys, for sure.

Speaking of intros, a number of your songs begin with bass lines. Also, a number of cuts have sections where the rest of the band drops out except for the bass.

DE ANGELIS A lot of times when we're writing songs, it's either me or Thomas coming up with a riff. We don't have any rules like, "It's got to start with guitar," so there are certain songs, like "Gasoline" or "Mammamia" or "Baby Said," that start out with the bass. We've only got two melodic instruments, so we try to mix it up. Sometimes we leave one out and then the other comes in, or maybe we harmonize.

RAGGI Sometimes we'll have a bridge where I'll just vamp on some chords, and Victoria will play a lead line on the bass. If it sounds good, we'll do it — whatever works.

Thomas, do you have any particular approach to solos, other than keeping them short and powerful?

RAGGI To be honest, I try not to analyze solos too much before I play them. Generally, I go by instinct. I'll just start jamming, and I might play 30 minutes of leads for a song, and then we'll pick the best parts. Or maybe we'll pick little bits of what I've played and do a mash-up of sections. There was one song, though, "Mark Chapman," where I played a more composed solo. I played it one or two times and was like, "That's the part!"

The album is beautifully produced, but everything feels like a live band. I assume that was the idea.
DE ANGELIS Oh, it was. It sounds live because it is. That's how we write. We don't sit around and write on computers. We don't want to be one of those bands that's good in the studio, but then when you see us live, it's like, "Oh, what happened?" Sure, we add bits of production, another guitar here and there, but we like to keep it real.

Thomas, you use a Squier Strat quite a lot. Guitar companies are going to throw a lot of instruments at you now.
RAGGI Oh, I love the Squier. Now I have a lot of cool Strats, but the Squier is still my main guitar. I grew up with it, so I always use it.
DE ANGELIS Now you use more Strats.
RAGGI No, not really. Actually, I've discovered Telecasters and they're kind of a new avenue for me. They're great. On the song "Kool Kids," I used a Tele for the riff, and it's super sick.

Victoria, how about you? Are you still playing the Danelectro Longhorn bass?
DE ANGELIS Always! [*laughs*] I love the feel and the tone of it. It's very unique. No way am I going to change. That bass is me.

"Mark Chapman" is one of the songs sung in Italian, but obviously we all know that name. What's the story behind it?
DE ANGELIS We felt like the media tends to glamorize killers and other bad people — almost like they're cool or something. We wanted to portray things the way they really are. Also, musically, we wanted it to seem almost as if you were being followed. It has a sense of anxiety. It's probably the fastest song we've ever written. And the solo is very… I don't know how to say it in English.
RAGGI It's very noisy?
DE ANGELIS Noisy! You get the feeling like something is wrong.

I think it's interesting that you tackled such subject matter. You guys are very young and weren't even born when John Lennon was murdered. What do John Lennon and the Beatles mean to you?
DE ANGELIS Yes, we're young, but as musicians we understand what the Beatles did. They made some of the biggest changes music has ever seen. They changed the whole culture. If it weren't for them, we probably wouldn't do what we do. What we play is very different from them, but we're inspired by them. They're fucking icons, and I admire them so much.
RAGGI They showed that you could make songs in pretty much any style. It's like, whatever you want to write, you can do it because the Beatles did it.

"The Loneliest" is a really affecting rock ballad, and Thomas, you pulled off something of an epic solo. You do lay into the Whammy pedal on that one. Was that a little Tom Morello influence?
RAGGI [*laughs*] Oh yeah, of course. I had fun experimenting with some new sounds with pedals on that one. I used a Whammy on that one, and I worked out the solo in no time at all. I think I had it down in five minutes. It was a natural. There's some parts on the record where I got these Leslie sounds. I love doing all that stuff.

With success, your world is spinning very quickly now. You're working at a very fast clip. How do you take care of

DANIELE VENTURELLI/GETTY IMAGES (OPPOSITE)

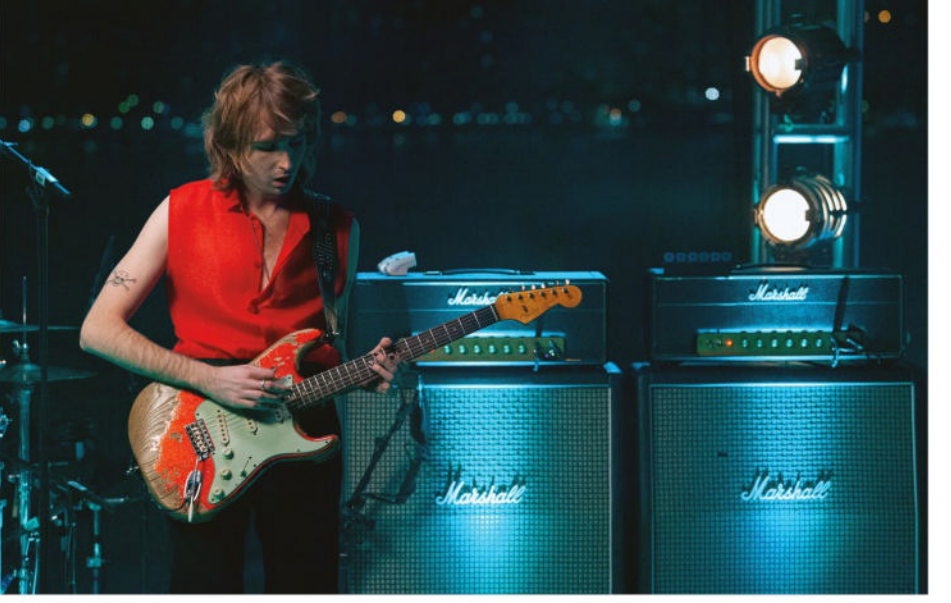
yourselves mentally and physically to avoid burn-out?

DE ANGELIS For us, playing together is it. We can never play enough. Even when we're on tour, we don't feel stress because we enjoy the music so much. Whatever else is going on, when we get onstage, it all disappears in five minutes. The energy we get from the crowds cheers us up and keeps us going. There can be a bit of a routine now that this is our job — we have to be this place and that — but at the same time we try to remember how fortunate we are.

Finally, let me ask you, what about your musicianship would you like to improve? Is there anything in particular you want to work on?

DE ANGELIS Hmm… I think I want to come up with parts that work in more interesting ways with the guitar. I don't necessarily want to follow what Thomas is doing; I want different layers, more counterpoints.

RAGGI If I have a goal, I'd say it's to find something that's mine, some cool stuff that the minute you hear it, you go, "Oh, yeah, that's Thomas." Like with Tom Morello, the way he works with the cable or the kill switch, or the way he uses a Whammy pedal — he's iconic with all of that. I'd like to find more of my own thing, but it has to fit with the music, always.



Raggi's touring rig includes a pair of Marshall 1987X heads, which he runs through Marshall 1960AX and 1960BX cabinets. But "I also love Fender Twins," he says.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Thomas Raggi and **Victoria De Angelis** reveal the inner workings of their rigs.

Thomas Raggi's live pedalboard includes a Strymon Mobius modulation and BigSky reverb, an Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man and POG polyphonic octave generator, an Effetti Di Clara Agata Booster, a Fulltone 2 OCD overdrive, an ISP Technologies Decimator, an Empress Effect Compressor MKII, a Dunlop Cry Baby Rack Wah, a Pro Co Sound RAT distortion, an MXR Talk Box, and the Boss ME-50B bass multieffects and RC-50 Loop Station.

"The talk box is a new entry in my pedalboard setup," Raggi says. "I discovered this effect when I wrote the song 'Mark Chapman' for the new album. After I used it for the solo, I figured out how to include it during the live show to create a special talk box moment.

"IT WAS A BASS EFFECT, BUT I DISCOVERED THAT IT GAVE THE GUITAR A SICK SOUND. IT'S AMAZING"

"A funny thing happened when I wrote the solo for the song 'The Loneliest,'" he adds. "I was just thinking of putting a Whammy into the solo, but I was in a different studio and I used the Boss ME-50B, because it was the only thing with a Whammy effect in the studio. It's a bass effect, but I discovered that it gave the guitar a sick sound. It's amazing."

Raggi's MXR Memory Man Deluxe is an original model that he received from a former guitar teacher. He notes that he uses the Dunlop Rack Wah "because I love to play with three wah pedals in different positions onstage. I can literally run across the stage and use the one that I want for solos." Of all his pedals, the Strymon Mobius is his favorite effect. "I particularly like the Rotary setting. I try to make that my trademark." The Loop station, meanwhile, is a new entry in the live show. "It's become a fundamental pedal for my solo for 'The Loneliest.' I've also used an EBow during that part. I experiment a lot."

For amps, Raggi plugs into two Marshall 1987X heads, which he runs through Marshall 1960AX and 1960BX cabinets. "I also love Fender Twins," he says. "I've used them a lot in the past."

Victoria De Angelis's setup is considerably more compact. She uses mostly distortion effects — a Pro Co RAT and an Effetti Di Clara Agata Booster — as well as an Electro-Harmonix Micro POG. Her amp of choice is an Ampeg SVT Classic 350. — *JB*

With Tom Morello (right) at the 2023 Sanremo Music Festival.

A DIRECT LINE TO HEAVEN

As a guitarist, singer-songwriter and civil rights visionary who brought Black and White music together, **Pops Staples** created his own genre and the quintessential Americana guitar tone.

BY NIKKI O'NEILL

IT'S MORNING AS we drive through Bronzeville, passing soul food restaurants, 19th century mansions, humble brick buildings, Baptist churches and a contemporary arts district. This neighborhood on Chicago's South Side nurtured many American music icons during the Great Migration of 1916–1970: early jazz pioneers King Oliver and Louis Armstrong, electric blues innovators Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, gospel trailblazers Thomas Dorsey and Mahalia Jackson, and the forerunner of soul, Sam Cooke. Gospel music as an industry was born here when Black congregations took over the churches after the White flight. The new ministers, middle-class and educated, seeking to assimilate with White society, wanted nothing to do with blues. When Dorsey and Jackson became national superstars by embracing their blues roots, the community's church doors reluctantly opened a crack toward secular music influences.

It was in this tension-filled intersection of blues and gospel that, in the 1940s, Roebuck "Pops" Staples gathered his children Cleotha, Pervis, Yvonne and Mavis in the living room of their Bronzeville home to teach them spirituals from his childhood in the Mississippi Delta. "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" was the first. With a pawnshop acoustic guitar, he assigned each voice to a harmony, creating a blend that sounded like no other vocal group. Later, he would accompany himself and his family group on an electric guitar plugged into a DeArmond tremolo unit, creating a signature tone that has influenced generations of guitarists.

"To me, that tremolo, vibrato and deep, rich reverb, paired with his guitar of choice, provided a direct line to the heavens," says Ben Harper, who worked with Mavis Staples as a producer and songwriter on her 2019 album, *We Get By*. Harper grew up hearing the Staple Singers' albums as a child in his family-run music store, The Folk Music Center, in Claremont, California. "I hear a great deal of Pops in the overarching sonic landscape of what has become Americana. I hear him in Ry Cooder. I would venture to say that Pops Staples invented the Americana tone of guitar as far-reaching as Daniel Lanois, and if I had to, I would bookend that with Jason Isbell."

Pops Staples poses with his Parker Fly Deluxe in Chicago, June 1994.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Besides his one-of-a-kind tone, Pops' masterful sense of time and band leadership is evident on songs like "Freedom Highway" and "Long Walk to D.C.," where his swampy open E♭ and E chord licks intertwine with his lead singing while he's directing the group's intricate handclapping patterns, harmony vocals and Mavis's lead vocal.

"Pops was an entire band early on — bass, drums, guitar, bandleader and singer, all in one person," says Rick Holmstrom, Mavis Staples' guitarist and musical director since 2007. He got hooked when a friend gave him a mixtape with the Staple Singers' mid-1950s recordings, which truly showcase Staples' guitarwork. "Pops grooved like mad, and made a drummer look good. I was just listening to the Vee-Jay stuff in anticipation of talking to you," Holmstrom says, referring to the group's early sides on the Black-owned Vee-Jay label. "Those recordings are basically his guitar, hand claps and the voices. Pop's guitar is percolating under the voices, and he's creating a groove and a key center. But it's all about the songs and the vocals."

"Pops is as original as the Chicago sound. But he's one man"
— BEN HARPER

Notes Harper, "When I listen to Pops' playing, it's awe-inspiring because I hear him playing chord lines, piano lines... His voicings cover so much at once. You don't notice anything missing, and you don't long to hear one other instrument."

Another key ingredient to Pops Staples' playing is blues, learned straight from the source. Charley Patton's fierce and free guitar playing made a profound impression on Staples when he was a motherless teen with 13 siblings, picking cotton at a plantation near Drew, Mississippi. Staples' grandfather William was a former slave, and his methods for surviving in the Jim Crow south with dignity intact and without buckling were followed by his sharecropping father Warren and the entire family. Comfort was found by going to church and gathering every night to sing hymns. Only spiritual music was allowed at home. After sneaking out on weekend afternoons to see Patton entertain sharecroppers, Staples — who'd learned to play his brother's guitar and then bought his own — eventually became a promising blues talent himself. Playing at house parties opened up his world and made him more money than the 50 cents he got for a 10-hour day of picking cotton. Yet when Staples got off the bus in Chicago in 1936 to find a better future, it wasn't the blues clubs he sought out.

ABOVE: The Staple Singers pose in 1955. Pops is playing a Kay archtop.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"Pops is as original as the Chicago sound, but he's one man," Harper says. "He learned from Charley Patton, who learned from Robert Johnson, so he was in that circle. But he took Delta blues and branched it out to an entirely original sonic landscape. I think it's fair to say that the Staple Singers are their own genre. They didn't fit into the gospel sound. Even having come from Chicago, they didn't fit into the Chicago sound, and it would've been very easy for him to subscribe to that."

"You know, he's slippery," notes Son Little, a.k.a. Aaron Livingston, the producer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist on Mavis Staples' 2015 EP, *Your Good Fortune*. Livingston was introduced to the Staple Singers through the soundtrack from Spike Lee's 1994

(from left) Pops (playing a Fender Jazzmaster), Cleotha, Pervis and Mavis record in the late 1960s.

movie, *Crooklyn*, and was floored when he came upon one of their early '60s recordings on the Riverside label. "Pops reminds me a bit of Hubert Sumlin," he says. "It's maybe not as intricate, but there's a similar approach. I'm not sure what the technical word for this would be, but it's playful. He's such an interesting character, who played this haunting blues while singing gospel songs at the same time."

"Pops' influences, like Son House and Charley Patton, sure, I can hear those," Holmstrom says. "He grew up in Mississippi, and he's playing all the bent, slurred and rubbing blues notes, but to me his playing has as much Lightnin' Hopkins to it as Son House. It's getting down to the nitty gritty of the most direct lines. Like Big Bill Broonzy, that's a whole different, sweeter and more uptown style of playing. But Pops was all about those 3rd notes bent up just enough to make you go 'Oooh!' Very eerie. Like in 'Uncloudy Day' or 'Sit Down, Servant' where they get the hand claps going, and then go to off-time hand claps — it's incredible stuff to me. I never get tired of it."

Duke Ellington, who was a huge fan of the group, may have described Pops Staples best when he told him, "You play gospel in a blues key." Staples remained faithful to gospel music throughout his life, even though he came to crosspollinate it with blues, folk and soul. But back in the '50s in Chicago, when the Staple Singers started performing at local churches, gospel artists who played electric guitars raised some eyebrows.

ABOVE: Posing for a publicity photo in 1965. RIGHT: Rehearsing for the Stax Records Christmas concert at Stax in Memphis, with (center back, left to right) Steve Cropper, Al Jackson Jr. and Donald "Duck" Dunn, December 20, 1968.

"Pops could've played the Rhodes, Wurlitzer or organ, but he was carrying the tune for the band in a convenient way, with an instrument that he could pick up himself and not rely on others to provide," Holmstrom says. "Mavis told me that it took a while for that guitar to be accepted, as it was not cool. People would walk in and wonder where's the organ or piano, and Pops would explain that this is how the Staple Singers roll. He put the tremolo on around the same time that Bo Diddley did. I have a theory that Pops did it to make the electric guitar sound more palatable to the churches because it didn't stand out as hard-edged, it sounded a little warmer."

Since Pops Staples' guitar playing sets such an evocative mood, we ask Holmstrom for a good first step to learning his style.

"Having a rock-solid E chord vibe is essential," he says. "With Pops, the actual notes and patterns look simple if written out, but the feel is nearly impossible to copy. I've been with Mavis for 15 years, and I still don't have it down exactly. Luckily for me, Mavis isn't dogmatic about everything being just so. She just wants it groovy and spicy. Maybe turn on 'the shakes,'" he offers, using Pops' description for tremolo. "Hammer on that E chord. Do lots of hammering on the open A string up to B, and the open D string up to E. Let the low E string sustain while picking little melodies out on the G, B and E strings. Bend a flat 3 to 3 on the G string."

"You can also leave the skinny E open, while hammering B to C♯ on the B string, or jockey back and forth from skinny E to the flat 7 on the B string. Change to whatever other chord the song has, keeping that same vibe. Sometimes Pops would play unison licks on guitar along with the vocals, and sometimes he'd answer the vocals. But having rock-solid, open cowboy-position tonic chords is key."

"It's about an attitude," Livingston says. "By listening to Pops both as a player and singer, there's a lot to learn about patience and subtlety. He's a great example of someone who shows the proper restraint and respect. There's nothing rushed."

"With Pops, it's not a Joe Maphis or Chet Atkins thing," Holmstrom says. "There's some fingerpicking going on, but it's never at the expense of the groove. Pops would play some bass-note lick, and then hit the bottom E string so it would ring like a drone while he's playing things over it. When people try to play that, they usually make it a little too countrified. It needs to be relaxed, and it doesn't have to be perfect. In fact, it shouldn't be. It has everything to do with getting over the vibe of the lyric and singing."

The guitar-powered Staples Singers may have struggled to illicit a warm response from some Chicago ministers in the late '50s, but the group's rustic style and lack of self-importance in a city of fiercely competitive gospel divas appealed to parishioners. The harmonies struck a nostalgic chord, the handclaps and guitar sounded down-home, and the melodies were easy to sing along with. In a way, their songs had a folk music quality, but with deep grooves, catchy hooks and sanctified vocals. In the '60s, it would become "soul folk."

Word spread quickly about the four charming teens who seemed to be gifted with the voices of old souls, and their sharply dressed father, who captivated Black and White audiences with his Delta blues guitar and gentle way of singing and speaking that still carried so much authority.

"I've never heard any musician with that depth of soul to present with such ease," Harper says. "As far as blues, soul and gospel go, traditionally there's a bit of an urgency that can come out as being 'reached' for. It never felt to me like he was having to push it. It's

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (1965); DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (STAX)

LEFT: Performing on ABC's *In Concert* in 1974. ABOVE: (from left) Cleotha, Pops, Mavis and Yvonne

the authority of an Otis or an Aretha, but with such an ease. There are very few people who can do that."

The Staple Singers began touring in the late '50s, often through hostile parts of Jim Crow country, joined by a young Sam Cooke and Aretha Franklin, who hadn't yet crossed over to R&B. As the '60s arrived, they performed at jazz and folk festivals. Everyone from Elvis Presley to Bob Dylan and the Band were smitten. One recording that stands out from this era is the group's devastating version of Bob Dylan's "Masters of War."

At the heart of Pops' artistry is service and activism. The Staple Singers' first meeting with civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., in 1963, may have crystallized his musical purpose and life mission. Gathering his family afterward, he famously said, "If he can preach it, we can sing it." The violent confrontations in Selma, Alabama inspired him to write the title track for their powerful 1965 live album, *Freedom Highway*.

"When I hear Pops' music, I hear as much of a calling as I do hear music," Harper says. "And that calling is what pulled him close to Dr. King, where music led him and the group to the forefront of the civil rights movement. Because when you start doing that type of work, with boots on the ground, that is God's work. It's a cultural higher calling that very few musics ever have the opportunity to reach. And he not only reached it but defined it. For me."

Both Harper and Staples are known for writing social commentary songs that resonate with wide audiences. As Harper wrote the songs for *We Get By*, he naturally continued the lyric themes that Mavis has championed for six decades: civil rights, faith, spiritual comfort and perseverance. But it's a challenge to write message songs without coming off as clunky. How does one pull it off?

"Early on, there was a moment where I would question that," Harper says. "But you have to be ready to lay it on the line — comfortable with supporting your narrative and taking a stand, and also with the pushback. And I've always been comfortable with that. It's the tradition I come from. And I'd like to think that had I been writing the songs I've been writing for the last 30 years, but 30 years earlier, I would've been shoulder to shoulder with him. But I came up at the time that I came up, and I feel honored to be doing this interview in honor of that tradition." Harper pauses. "I don't know what's harder: to get to be mentioned in the same breath, or to be worthy."

The Staple Singers' commercial peak arrived four years after they were signed to Stax, as their 1972 album, *Be Altitude: Respect Yourself*, featured two of the group's biggest hits, "I'll Take You There," and "Respect Yourself." Although these fabulously grooving songs are most people's introduction to the group, most of their Stax releases won't get you hip to Pops Staples' guitar playing. Sadly, he was shut out from playing at the sessions by Stax executive/co-owner Al Bell, as the label tried to crank out potential hits for their artists, relying on the Swampers, the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, to cut finished rhythm tracks at a non-stop pace. There was no time to integrate Staples' quirky playing with the well-oiled session player machine. Supposedly, the decision greatly disappointed Jimmy Johnson and Eddie Hinton of the Swampers, who were huge disciples of his guitar style. Hinton's guitar solo on "I'll Take You There" is a tribute to Staples, who was hurt by being shut out, but open to Stax's efforts to broaden his family's career success.

"He was an entire band. He grooved like mad, and made a drummer look good"
— RICK HOLMSTROM

ABC PHOTO ARCHIVES/DISNEY GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT CONTENT/GETTY IMAGES (LIVE); MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (GROUP)

THE CIRCLE IS UNBROKEN

Chicago soul and gospel legend **Mavis Staples** talks about Pops and her family's remarkable life in music.

BY ALICE CLARK

How did the Staple Singers form?
It started with Pops. He grew up in Mississippi, one of 14 children, and after dinner they would go out on the porch and sing harmonies, and people from all around would come to listen. Then Pops moved to Chicago and he sang in an all-male group called the Trumpet Jubilees. Each week he'd go to sing and no one would show up, and he would come home disgusted. And he'd go back the next week and the same thing would happen. And by the third week when this happened, he came home, headed straight to the closet where he had a guitar he'd bought at the pawnshop, and he calls us children into the living room, sits us on the floor in a circle and begins giving us voice parts to sing for "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." These were the same parts he and his brothers and sisters had sung in Mississippi.

So how did you make the leap from singing on that living room floor to performing in front of an audience?
Pops' sister, our Aunt Katie, lived with us, and one night she comes in to listen and says, "Shucks, you all sound pretty good, I want you to sing at my church." So we sang at Aunt Katie's church, and the people liked us so much they clapped us back, and we had to sing "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" three times, as it was the only song Pops had taught us the whole way through. After that, Pops said, "Shucks, these people like us. We need to go home and learn some more songs." [*laughs*]

"Uncloudy Day" was the one that crossed you over.
I sang bass on "Uncloudy Day," and people would hear the record and say, "That's no little girl; that must be a man or a big fat lady." And when we sung it live, Pervis would step up to the mic as if he was going to sing my part and then suddenly I'd run out in front of him and sing. It always surprised everyone. And the president of Vee-Jay [*Records*], she called Pops and said how "Uncloudy Day" was selling like an R&B record. It was the first gospel song to sell a million.

Seeing Bob Dylan at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival was also pivotal in your musical development.
We were standing over on the side of the stage talking, and Pops said, "Wait a minute,

> **"Pops hated that riff. We finally persuaded him to play it, and sure enough, everybody loved that bit"**

listen to what that kid is saying." And we did, and it hit me. I thought how awfully close to gospel his music was, and the stories he told in his songs were just so true. They had so much realness, you couldn't help but fall in love with what he was saying and the way he was saying it.

It was his song "Blowin' in the Wind" that struck a chord.
Oh yes, when he sang "Blowin' in the Wind," Pops said, "We can sing that song." Bobby was singing, "How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?" and my father had literally lived that. He told us stories of Mississippi, where if he was on one side of the street and a White man on the same side was walking towards him, he'd have to cross over. We came home and learned "Blowin' in the Wind" and Pops said he felt so good singing that song. He said, "This song is me." Then we listened to "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" and "Masters of War," and we sang them too.

Shortly after that, you started writing and singing your own civil rights songs.
Yes. Bob Dylan was ahead of us. We went to see Dr. Martin Luther King. We happened to be in Montgomery on a Sunday. We didn't have to sing until the evening, and we were in a hotel and Pops had been listening to Dr. King's radio program. He said to us, "I like the way he speaks and I want to go to his 11 o'clock service. Would you like to come?" We all said yes. We went to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and we were ushered in and seated, and we listened. And at the end of the sermon, the congregation filed out, and Dr. Martin Luther King is at the door to shake everyone's hand. Pops stood and talked to him for a little while, and when we got back to the hotel he told us, "I really like this man's speaking and his message." Then he said, "I think if he can preach it, we can sing it." We started singing freedom songs, and we joined the movement. The first one Pops wrote was "Freedom Highway."

Another important message song was Pops' "Why (Am I Treated So Bad)."
Why that was Dr. King's favorite! We would sing before Dr. King would speak, and just as we were leaving the hotel, he would tell Pops, "Wait a minute, Stap: You be singing my song

Mavis Staples performs during the 2019 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival 50th Anniversary, on May 2, 2019.

ERIKA GOLDRING/GETTY IMAGES

tonight, right?" And Pops would say, "I be singing your song."

You recorded six albums for Stax between 1968 and '74. What was that experience like?

It was great. Steve Cropper produced our first record [*1968's* Soul Folk In Action], and we were so excited to meet them all, because we knew the music. But we didn't know the people. And to get over there after we had been singing our freedom songs, and to see an integrated group in Booker T. & the M.G.'s — they couldn't go in the bathroom or eat in a restaurant or stay in a hotel together, but they could sing and make music together. And it was just unbelievable to meet Otis Redding, William Bell and Eddie Floyd. We were in good company at Stax. You see, Pops thought Stax was an all-Black company — we joined because of Al Bell. Pops saw Al like a son. He was charismatic and smart, and he was a Black man running a company in Memphis. It was a good move. Stax were the best, and when the empire crumbled, it was awful.

Tell me about "Respect Yourself," your 1971 number-two hit written by Mack Rice and Luther Ingram.

We were in the studio recording one day, and anyone could walk in on the session. Well, Mack Rice came in and said, "Pops I've got just the song for you." Mack, Luther Ingram and a few others had been talking, and Luther said, "Us as Black people, we got to start respecting ourselves." A bomb went off in Mack Rice's head, and that's where the song came from. Well, Pops hated that riff — the "dip deedly dee deedly dee dee" bit. He said. "That doesn't sound like the Staple Singers." But Mack kept saying the kids will love it, and we finally persuaded Pops to play the riff. And sure enough, everybody loved that bit. For us, it was about the lyric: "If you disrespect anybody that you run into, how in the world do you think anybody's s'posed to respect you?" Every lyric in that song is the truth.

What role did such songs play in the civil rights movement?

When we started singing those freedom songs, we thought we could change the world. When we would march with Dr. King and sing "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," we felt we were doing something positive. Music gives that outlook. It motivates you and inspires you and can take you on a different route. The congressman John Lewis wrote the notes to [*Mavis's 2007 album*] *We'll Never Turn Back*. He said to me, "Your family were the soundtrack of the civil rights movement. You inspired us to keep on going. You motivated us to keep on marching and singing those songs." It would be a terrible world without music. Music keeps you going. It helps you keep your head held high.

When Stax went bankrupt, the Staple Singers signed with Curtis Mayfield's Curtom label, releasing 1975's *Let's Do It Again*, the soundtrack to the Bill Cosby and Sidney Poitier film of the same name. You'd known Curtis from when you were growing up in Chicago.

Curtis was like my baby brother. He was a great poet and he lived around the corner from us. One day he came to Pops and said, "I want to write songs like the Staple Singers do," and Pops said, "Curtis, man, you're a writer, a poet. Write those songs." And the first one Curtis wrote [*in that vein*] was "Move On Up," and Pops said, "That's my boy!"

Anyway when Curtis told Pops his part on "Let's Do It Again" — "Now I like you lady, so fine with your pretty hair" — Pops said, "Curtis man, I'm not going to say that. I'm a church man." Curtis says, "Oh Pops, the Lord won't mind. I'll pray for you." We really wanted to hear our voices on the big screen and we managed to talk Pops into doing it. Every time Pops sung it onstage, all the ladies in the audience would cheer and he would have this big grin on his face.

ABOVE: Performing on ABC's *The Sonny Comedy Revue* in 1974. RIGHT: Pops Staples onstage at the Chicago Blues Festival, June 8, 1986.

The down-home gospel quintet from Bronzeville had become an international act, playing theater and arena stages. After leaving the sinking ship of Stax and signing with Warner Bros., they agreed to team up with another Staples disciple, Curtis Mayfield, to record *Let's Do It Again*, the sexually powered song and soundtrack for the 1975 comedy, starring Sydney Poitier and Bill Cosby. It became their last hit. They toured in Africa; were offered an opening slot on the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main St.* tour, performed for 112,000 people at Wattstax in Los Angeles, and made an appearance in Martin Scorsese's 1978 music documentary, *The Last Waltz*. They lost their footing afterward, in the era of disco and throughout the '80s, although Prince's production of two solo albums with Mavis Staples helped to slightly reignite appreciation for her and the group.

"Pops is showing you another way. It gets the message across"
— SON LITTLE

Pops Staples also experienced something of a second act in the '90s, when he got work as a theater actor in Chicago and recorded two solo albums, including 1992's *Father Father*. Featuring guest appearances by roots music admirers, the album won a "Contemporary Blues" Grammy and brought Pops some deserved attention at a time when he was in his 80s. After he became ill in 1997, he painstakingly completed the sessions for one more solo record, handing Mavis the master tapes with the words "Don't lose this." At the turn of the millennium — one year after the Staple Singers were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the frail patriarch got to claim a last moment of recognition — he passed away. His final album — rightly titled *Don't Lose This* — came out posthumously in 2015 on Wilco's dBPM label, just two months before Mavis released the *Your Good Fortune* EP.

What can Pops Staples offer us in this day and age, in a guitar community of players showing everything they've got in short TikTok or Instagram videos, with so much value being placed on chops and flash?

"That's a really good question," Holmstrom says. "I see little pockets of young folks that I know, who are looking for a certain kind of authenticity in the things that they do. To them, the early stuff of the Staple Singers is inspiring. Remember that this initially was a group created in their living room to bring joy to their family, friends and church. It wasn't about million-miles-an-hour licks. To me, it has everything to do with the vocals and getting the point of the song across."

"Guitar playing has an infinite number of lanes," Harper says. "And there's only so much study in a lifetime on any subject or style on your instrument. But if you are all the way to the opposite side of what Pops does, and flash and fast lead guitar playing is your lane, but you're interested in learning how to accompany yourself as a singular ensemble, I would say Pops is the first point of entry. *Freedom Highway* is a great place to start. That's where I started."

"You always want to have a range, because people express themselves in so many different ways, whether it's John McLaughlin or Slash," Livingston adds. "Pops is showing you another way, but he's really playing in his own style. It's not flashy, but it gets the message across. He's setting the scenery. There's space for his own voice, and he's laying a foundation for Mavis's glorious voice to happen. This applies not just to guitar but to anyone working in a group: You have to be aware of how the other group members are doing, how they're feeling. You have to pay attention, and listen not just the first time, but every time. Those are the things that really separate the greats from the skilled."

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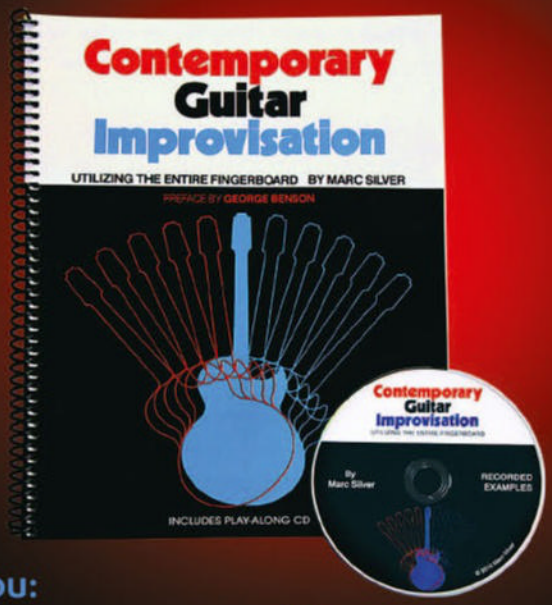

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The Master of Slide Guitar

Playing otherworldly Hindustani slide licks on instruments of his own invention, **Debashish Bhattacharya** connects East to West in a fusion that's earned him raves from John McLaughlin and Americana Dobro icon Jerry Douglas.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

DEBASHISH BHATTACHARYA IS truly a player's player. It's not unusual for guitarists to heap praise on their pals, but when luminaries gush like an atmospheric river, one must pay attention to what they say, and Bhattacharya inspires an impressive array of artists. His 2013 album, *Beyond the Ra*gasphere, featured world jazz maestro John McLaughlin and Americana Dobro icon Jerry Douglas, and both are passionate in their praise.

"Debashish is the master of the slide guitar," McLaughlin proclaims. "From his soulful playing in the introductions to his compositions, to the brilliance of his up-tempo playing, he has no equal. A must for all guitarists!"

Douglas adds that Bhattacharya is "at the forefront of a new body of Indian slide players. His sense of melody is uncanny, and he has all the tools and history to back it up. Debashish has no peer in the depth of his technique and it is very obvious that he has put in the time listening to the masters that came before him. Now he is putting it all to good use on this new recording."

The Sound of the Soul (Abstract Logix) features four transcendent, all-acoustic tracks, and players of all styles can learn a lifetime's worth of lessons by immersing themselves. Playing in a lap-steel style on singular instruments he created for himself, Bhattacharya offers an enticing escape from Western worries and the trappings of familiar guitar tropes. Derek Trucks is perhaps the most iconic example of how studying Eastern players can help players transform a style. By examining the music of masters, including one of Bhattacharya's mentors, sarod guru Ali Akbar Khan, Trucks took down-and-dirty bottleneck blues to mystical heights.

Likewise, Steve Kimock and Ben Harper adopted numerous Eastern techniques into their lap-steel styles, as evidenced on their *Last Danger of Frost* and *Winter Is for Lovers* albums, respectively (see their Frets features in the June 2016 and May 2021 issues, respectively, for insights). Kimock sums up his feeling about Bhattacharya with awe and humor: "If the aliens came and said, 'Bring us your champion,' you'd bring Debashish. He'd play and they'd go, 'Oh, okay. We'll let you guys live.'"

THIS PAGE: The gandharvi is a 12-/14-string guitar/veena/santoor/sarangi created by Debashish Bhattacharya.

OPPOSITE: Bhattacharya with the pushpa veena, his latest creation.

Can you explain the root connection between Eastern and Western guitar through the story of influential Hawaiian steel guitar pioneer Tau Moe?
Tau Moe was a prime entertainer for the British and American army allies during World War II. Tau and his wife, Rose, stayed and lived in Kolkata [*Calcutta*] doing wonderful concerts. Hawaiian music and culture became so popular that generations started playing electric pedal-steel guitar as well as ukulele and fingerpicking on the 12-string guitar. But a few traditional Indian music families took the lap Hawaiian guitar and started playing contemporary music on it. And out of all of them, my guru, [*father of Indian classical guitar*] Brij Bhushan Kabra, and a couple more people took in lap to play Eastern raga music. Almost around that same time, as a three year-old boy, I took up lap guitar. I'm now 60, and I've spent my whole life extending the slide guitar, brought from Western mode to Indian mode.

How did you start playing at such a young age?
Music is in my veins. My ancestors were generations of stage performers. My father was a classical vocalist who started working as an accountant after marrying my mother, and a year later someone gave him a Hawaiian guitar. My mother was also a great vocalist, and she put it in my hands when I was three. She showed me the major scale and how to hold the bar. The rest was fun. I started playing all the songs I heard everywhere. Gradually, it became my life partner.

"MY INSTRUMENTS ARE EXTENSIONS OF MYSELF CREATED TO CONNECT THE WORLD FROM THE EASTERN SOUND OF A GUITAR-LIKE INSTRUMENT"

The next year at the age of four I played on the *National Radio* program [*All India Radio*]. At age seven, I was denied a national scholarship, even though I stood first in the Indian national scholarship competition. My only disqualification was I played raga music on a Hawaiian guitar, not on a sitar or a veena. That made my relationship with Hawaiian guitar go further, stronger and forever. It made me desperate to what I do today and what I will do tomorrow — living on slide guitar.

Slide has been a big part of Western playing ever since the Delta blues. Can you draw a correlation?
Delta blues is based on human emotion, but for the same emotion, expression in Indian music has different ways of bending or accentuating notes. I've found many connections that would take a long time to explain, but in a few lines, blues scales are related to Indian mountain folk melodies. All along the Himalayan range from West to East, mountain songs from Tibet to Eastern Asia have the same pentatonic blues scale.

Can you explain Ali Akbar Khan's influence on your own playing?
In Kolkata, at the age of two on a winter night, I was seated in my parents' lap behind 5,000 people on the floor for an all-night concert. My father later told me that I was super excited to see and hear him playing, even at such a tender age. I followed his music and technique on slide guitar all my life. His melodic emotive expressions have stirred me so much since childhood until now. The appeal of such soul made me into what I'm doing today. Study was not easy with him. Since my guru, Brij Bhushan Kabra, was his student, I was recommended by my guru to him. After his father Acharya Allauddin Khan's life, he was and is my primary inspiration.

What's the intention behind building your own instruments, incorporating elements from Hawaiian lap steel and Americana-style Dobro to the sarod and perhaps other influences?
My instruments are extensions of myself. They were created to make a musical connection between East and West, and eventually a way to connect the world from the Eastern sound of a guitar-like instrument. They are guitar plus! But they are individually unique. You can hear a blend between all those genres and instruments you named in my four instruments. The chaturangui is a 22-/24-string combination

sitar/sarod/violin/rudra veena. The gandharvi is a 12-/14-string guitar/veena/santoor/sarangi. The anandi is a four-string slide ukulele. And I'm proud of my latest creation, the pushpa veena, which is the result of such humble lifelong work to utmost extension. But I only played chaturangui on the whole new album.

What is the tuning and time signature on the first track from *The Sound of the Soul*, "Ever the Flame Burns"?
It's D minor tuning: [*from low to high*] D A D F A D. The time is 10 beats per cycle at a fast tempo. The name of the rhythm is Sool Taal.

Can you explain the sense of song in an Indian raga compared to the Western sense?
Western melody is simpler and in one line, where changes in chords, harmony and the chorus are the highlight. Indian raga is the ancestor of diatonic and semi-diatonic music. It's modal. The relation and value of notes are created by the multi-note melodies and sub-melodies in a natural progression, where endless possibilities are confined into different scales.

BEHIND THE GEAR

Veena
A plucked pear-shaped instrument with 24 frets and three strings

Sarod
A fretless instrument for producing continuous glissandi

Rudra veena
A stick, or tube, zither with two large resonating gourds and seven or eight strings, including melody strings, chikari strings (used to emphasize the rhythm pattern), and one drone string

Santoor
A hammer dulcimer

Sarangi
A bowed short-necked instrument with 35 to 37 sympathetic steel or brass strings and three main gut strings

The chaturangui is a 22-/24-string combination sitar/sarod/violin/rudra veena and is featured on *The Sound of the Soul*.

Out of each scale are many different melodic progressions, and each progression can make hundreds of songs. Compositions are either lyric-based or instrumental. There are at least two stanzas, or sometimes four. It's completely different, yet universal music.

One of the wildest aspects for a Western listener is the drone of one tonality, rather than chord changes. It seems that you don't actually play chords yourself, only single notes. Is that accurate?

Yes. Another most important observation is that the two classical musics are extremely polarized, since Western classical music is very much dependent on each individual note, whereas in Indian classical music the space between two notes and the nuances around the notes make the music.

What slide do you prefer?

I play a John Pearse bullet bar named the Bhattacharya Hindustani Slide because it's made for my music. It's lighter and smaller, with fatter tone and more sustain. I also like the crystal bar from Ian McWee [*Diamond Bottlenecks' hand-blown lead crystal slides*]. They are round and small in length.

How did you develop your distinct slide technique?

I learned slide from the Western technique of the early '60s, but I have developed unique wrist techniques coupled with three-finger picking that made my approach a better close-circuit servant of slide guitar and raga music. My slide hand became extremely amiable and fluid as my fingers and wrist developed faster and bolder playing technique. After 50 years, it has more body involvement than a strictly fingers approach on the frets and strings. I've written a 16-chapter training course, and am looking forward for young slide guitarists joining the course and creating a new world.

"BLUES SCALES ARE RELATED TO INDIAN MOUNTAIN FOLK MELODIES"

What are your thoughts about fretted guitar?

Fretted guitar is mostly suitable for staccato notes, whereas music with fluid modal melodies is more suitable slide guitar, violin or flute. I have worked with many fretted guitarists like Bob Brozman, Martin Simpson, John McLaughlin and Hawaiian guitarists Jeff Peterson and Ledward Kaapana. The soul and story of the music is the commonality, which attracts me among all the differences.

Can you share some insights on the second track, the 40-minute "To His Lotus Feet"?

That is played with a bigger, hollow-neck chaturangui, which has a deeper, baritone sound, and the tuning is G modal [*all Gs and Ds*]. I use a Dorian scale, and the second and fifth notes are weaker — less played — when ascending, whereas descending has all of the notes. The rhythm has a slow, seven-beat cycle.

Our ancestors like Baba Ali Akbar Khan played ragas that are hours long. Raga is like a movie. It has scripts, stories, characters, incidents and different dialogues built in. A master portrays the raga in its details via melodic and rhythmic improvisation, and cross improvisation between melody and rhythm. It's been said that a longer performance makes the music deeper and more powerful. It's more like a live performance for the divine.

Can you address the final two tracks on *The Sound of the Soul*?

The title track is the same raga and same instrument as the second track, but at a faster tempo with a bit higher energy. The time is a 12-beat cycle. The final track, "Colors of Joy," is also the same instrument and open G tuning. The melody draws inspiration from a melodic scale in a folk song of Kashmir.

What recommendations might you have to inspire players to develop more profound musical connections?

Music is a vast ocean if you dive into yourself deeper! A "guru" can help you define yourself as a music practitioner, scholar or performing artist. A playful

Bhattacharya holds the chaturangui.

childhood experience of universal music and practicing the games of music will help a kid to grow in the vastness fearlessly. In youth, he or she has to take only one path and one faith for at least 20 years to achieve the power to see music from a 360-degree perspective, and an overall awareness is achieved.

John McLaughlin's work with Shakti is perhaps the most prominent connection point our readership has to Indian music. Can you share a thought on him?
John is the biggest East to West gateway after Pandit Ravi Shankar. His continuous divine works with giants of Indian classical music over decades has inspired generations of musicians in millions of ways. Watching his musical approach with Mahavishnu Orchestra as a young guitarist in 1984 was a stupendous milestone. Being a slide guitarist, it was impossible for me to follow his licks, but the aura and soundscape was inspirational. Seventeen years later, the Great invited me onstage. I feel blessed, and proud of the 17 years of hard work.

How about Jerry Douglas?
Jerry is known as the master of Dobro and bluegrass, but his musicality is astounding! His melodic expression touches me the most. Many heard his magical touch on my composition "JD2 Pillusion" [*from* Beyond the Ragasphere].

Who are some other Western guitar players that you appreciate?
B.B. King, for his total music and guitar playing. Al Di Meola, for his master musicality. Paco De Lucia, for the magical moments he created in every appearance. Ry Cooder, for his songs and slide guitar.

What are your goals for *The Sound of the Soul*?
I'm a professional guitarist, and if you call me "musician," I give you a smile. I definitely want to see commercial success for the album, but it's definitely my humble service, along with everyone involved, from the musicians to the label, the sound recordist to the journalist. The goal is to service to the musical minds, hoping this can enlighten their souls.

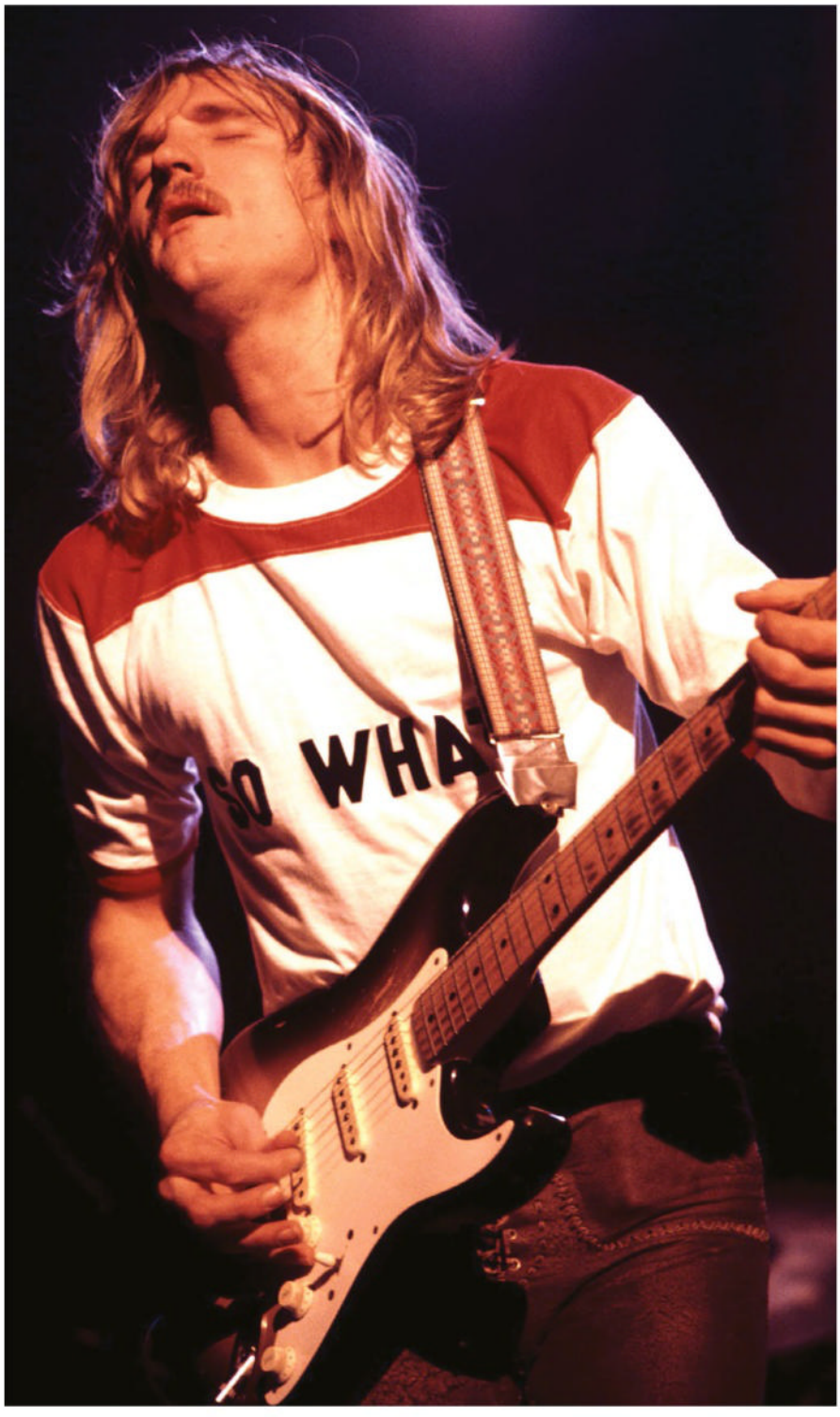
"MUSIC IS A VAST OCEAN IF YOU DIVE INTO YOURSELF DEEPER"

How do you use the guitar as a tool for spiritual growth, and how might we all?
Spirituality is like other elements of life: Some are visible and some are unseen. My music is not physically visible, per se, but my guitars send the soundscapes with the scent of spirituality. One can learn and grow his own spiritual atmosphere by diving into one's self. "Nobody teaches better spirituality than yourself" is a message for every child. Bonding with your own guitar can help you to see that path.

SPECIAL DELIVERY MAN

A look at the inspiring musical magic and distinctive touch in the playing of guitar legend Joe Walsh.

BY JEFF JACOBSON



BOBBY BANK/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

I HAVE WORKED as a professional music transcriber for most of my life, transferring music (especially guitar music) from the air to the page. Even before that, as a kid, I would always be doing what I then called "figuring stuff out," trying to decipher the magic I heard in my favorite musicians' playing. One day, I was struck by Louis Armstrong's trumpet solo on one of my dad's old recordings, and I knew right away I had to play it, in particular, one especially cool-sounding phrase. Once I figured it out, I quickly realized it was something I already knew how to play. I recalled that this had happened a couple of times before, and I had simply shrugged it off. But this time, it made me stop and think. As it turned out, I had stumbled onto one of the most important lessons I would learn about music: What made me want to learn that solo wasn't as much the notes as how Armstrong played them. In comedy, this is known as delivery. In music, we call it style, or *phrasing* — that elusive element imbuing notes with a special personal quality that makes you want to listen again and again, even though you already know the "punchline."

Joe Walsh is a master of phrasing, and it's no coincidence he also has a legendary sense of humor. Throughout his time with James Gang, his solo career and, of course, his continuing run with the Eagles, Walsh has written or co-written many classic songs and created some of the most memorable and catchy guitar parts committed to tape. There's even an internet meme floating around that says, "Even people who hate the Eagles are like, 'but Joe Walsh is alright.'" Let's explore what makes this celebrated guitarist's playing so much fun to listen to, while we learn more concretely what phrasing is all about, and how focusing on it can help each of us find our unique guitar voice.

One of the most memorable licks Walsh has recorded is one of his earliest. It kicks off the classic tune "Funk #49" from James Gang's 1970 album *James Gang Rides Again*. The lick is quirky and kind of funny — just like the man himself — and **Ex. 1** brings this curious phrase to

MORE ONLINE!

For audio of this lesson, go to **guitarplayer.com/may23-lesson**

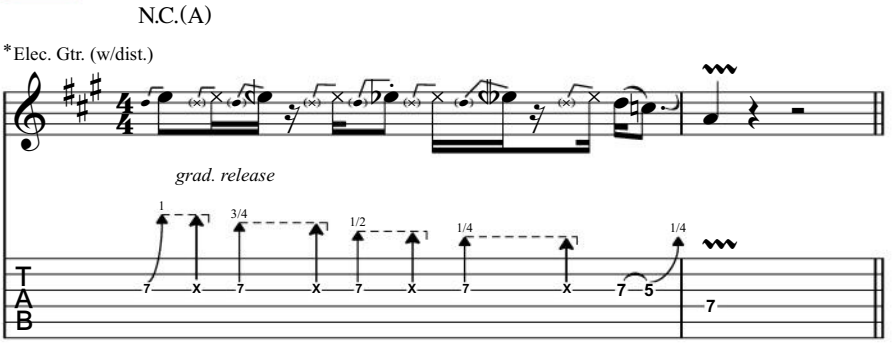
mind. At first, it might seem a bit tricky: Sound the first note normally, with your pick. Then, while continuing to hold the bend, sound the deadened note that follows by lightly resting your pick-hand middle finger on the underside of the G string as you attack it with your pick. The subsequent note is then plucked with that same middle finger, and the pattern repeats. Using a combination of both pick and fingers in this way or simultaneously is known as *hybrid picking*. If you try playing the phrase without deadening the string, you'll see how quickly the magic vanishes. Also, notice how some of the pitches sounded during the long release (the three-quarter- and one-quarter-step bends) can't be found conventionally on the fretboard, but, as guitarists, we can exploit our ability to bend strings to sound the pitches "in the cracks" between the fretted notes.

Ex. 2 offers another lick inspired by Walsh's playing in this song. Using a backward rake, a *ghost bend* — a silently bent note struck to sound only its release — and a droning open string, Walsh again conveys his colorful personality with just a few notes.

A hallmark of Walsh's style is his sly use of decorative nuances, such as bends, finger slides, vibrato and more. Nuances are a key part of phrasing, and Joe uses them in all sorts of nifty ways. In 1971, the guitarist left James Gang and formed the band Barnstorm with drummer Joe Vitale. That outfit's second and final release, *The Smoker You Drink The Player You Get*, was released under Walsh's name and included the juggernaut FM radio staple "Rocky Mountain Way." In it, the guitarist adds some of his characteristically swampy electric slide playing, as well as some of his trademark lead work, aided by the use of a talk box.

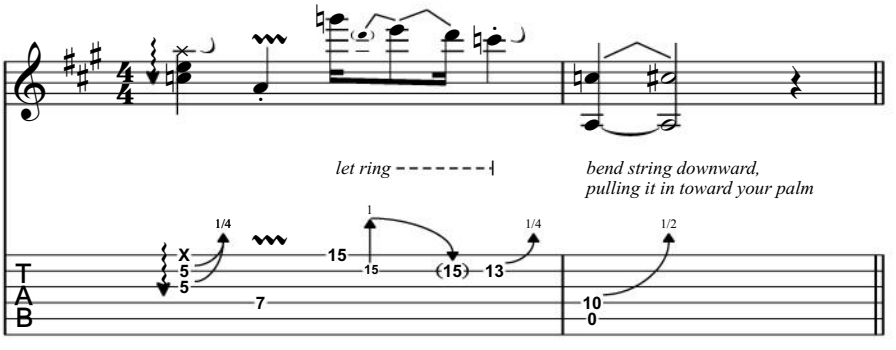
The song also showcases Walsh's talent for writing super-catchy and memorable riffs, which often reside in the guitar's lower register. **Ex. 3** is inspired by the riff featured in the song's breakdown section and is similarly based on the E minor pentatonic scale (E, G, A, B, D). Notice how almost all of the notes have some sort of nuance attached, whether it be a finger slide, vibrato or

Ex. 1

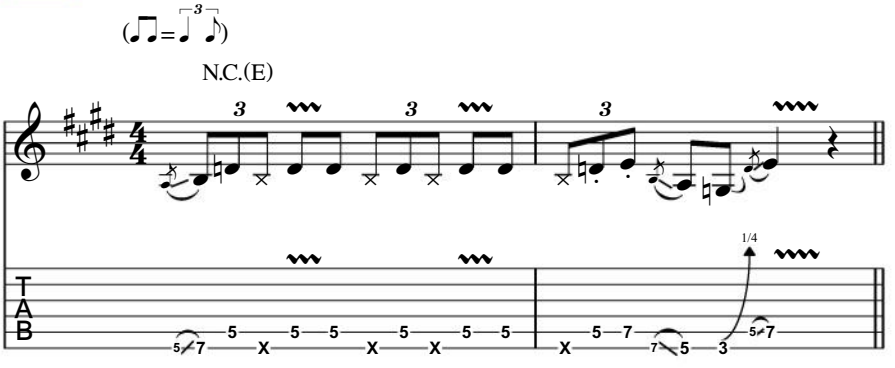


*All examples, except where indicated otherwise.

Ex. 2



Ex. 3



a dot on top indicating it's to be played *staccato*, or short. Here, the deadened notes are played softly, adding some rhythmic "bounce," and are sounded by lightly resting your 3rd finger on the 6th string's 7th fret as you pick.

The guitarist was shown how to play slide by none other than the great Duane Allman, and **Ex. 4** is inspired by Walsh's take-no-prisoners approach to slide. While his guitar is tuned to open E, (low to high, E, B, E, G♯, B, E), you really only need to tune your G string up to G♯ to be able to play this phrase, as the notes all fall on the top three strings. Notice again how almost every note has a slide or

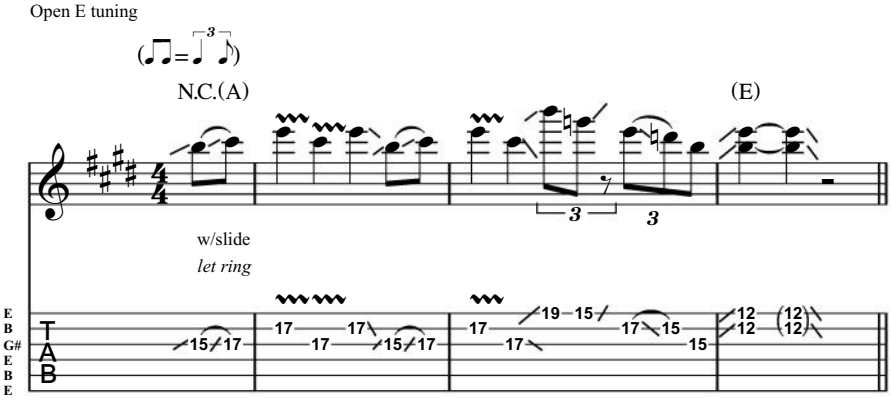
vibrato indicated. Covered further in my "What Should I Practice?" lessons in the September and October 2022 issues of *Guitar Player*, nuances like the ones we're exploring here are often thought of as the "little things," but they have enormous potential to add personality and style to your playing.

Walsh and Don Felder onstage in 1977.

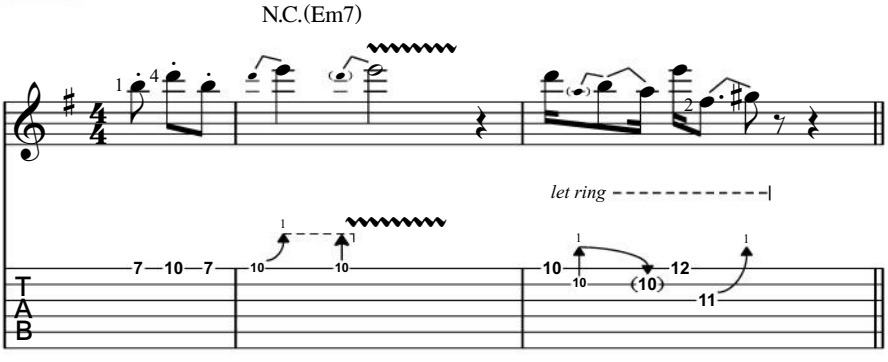
In 1975, Walsh made his Eagles debut, appearing on the band's fifth studio album, *Hotel California*. It includes the classic title track that features, during its outro, the epic trading-licks solo that Walsh shares with fellow lead guitarist Don Felder. A couple of songs later, the Eagles hit again with, this time with the Walsh co-write "Life in the Fast Lane," which emerged from a low-register pentatonic riff the guitarist had been using as a warm-up. Throughout the song, he also crafted some tasty melodic fills, which inform **Ex. 5**. Here, bends are used in more of a country style, similar to what a pedal-steel guitarist might play. Be sure to see the suggested fingerings included in this example, and notice in bar 2 how the gradual nature of the bend and release reveal the satisfying tension that's found in between the guitar's fretted pitches.

Ex. 6 brings to mind Walsh's playing in the song's outro solo, where he again

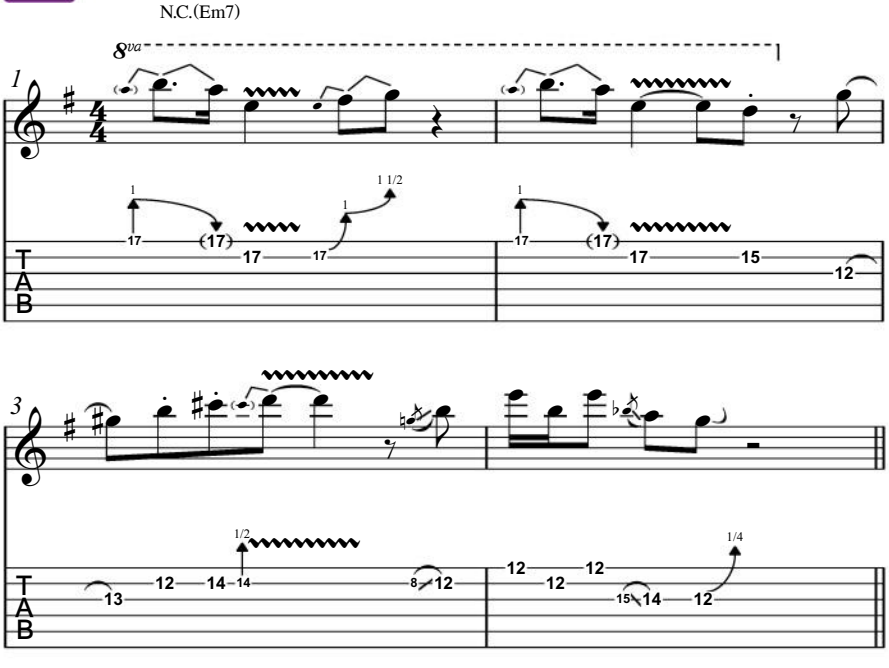
Ex. 4



Ex. 5



Ex. 6

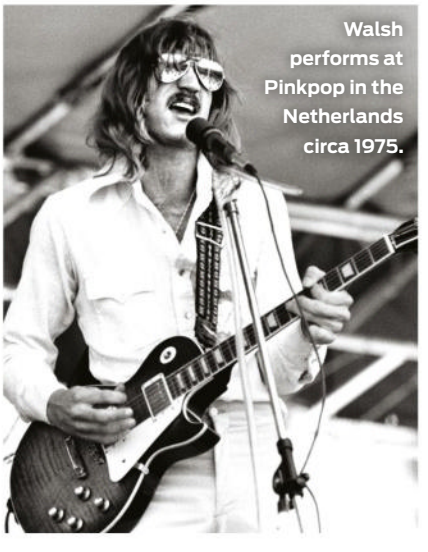


MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

uses ghost bends in his own inimitable way. The rhythm of our example's first bend release is notated strictly, but to summon the full desired effect, make the release as gradual as possible, its lowest point reached just a hair before you strike the following note. As with pitch, what's found in the space between concrete rhythms is often where the musical magic lies. Relying on your ears more than your eyes will go a long way toward getting these examples to sound just right.

Walsh's lead playing is often blues-based, but he also has a penchant for inserting catchy melodic phrases that aren't born from this style. An example can be heard in the outro of "In My Car," from his 1987 solo album, *Got Any Gum?*. Joe both literally and figuratively reaches outside the (pentatonic) box to create a memorable hook that's repeated over the chord changes. **Ex. 7** is inspired by this hooky phrase.

Walsh also shows his contemplative side in his songwriting, as heard in a passage from the title track to his 1985 solo album, *The Confessor*. In the intro, the guitarist uses double drop-D tuning (low to high, D, A, D, G, B, D) to add a lovely part, which mixes open strings and fretted notes on a clean electric. **Ex. 8** is reminiscent of his playing here.

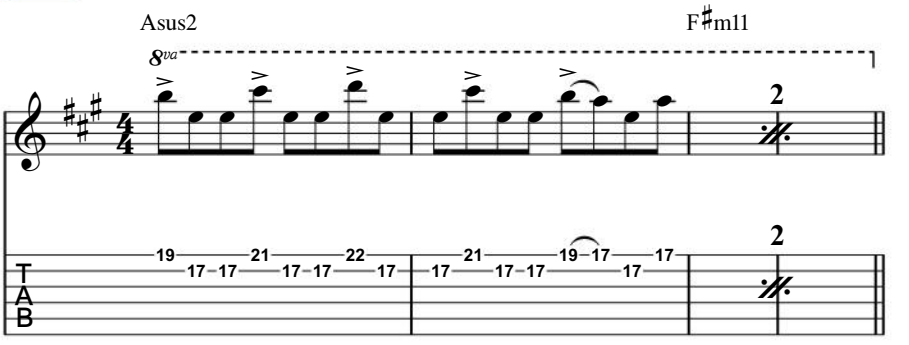


Walsh performs at Pinkpop in the Netherlands circa 1975.

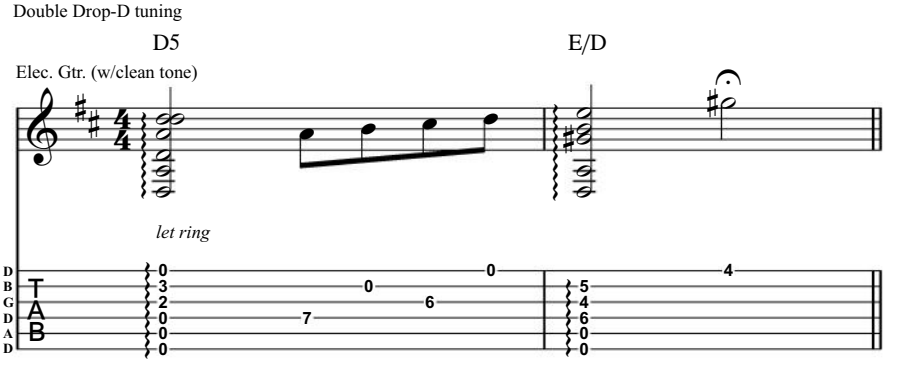
GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

A pair of Walsh's classic rhythm guitar parts can be found in "Life's Been Good," from his 1978 solo album, *But Seriously,*

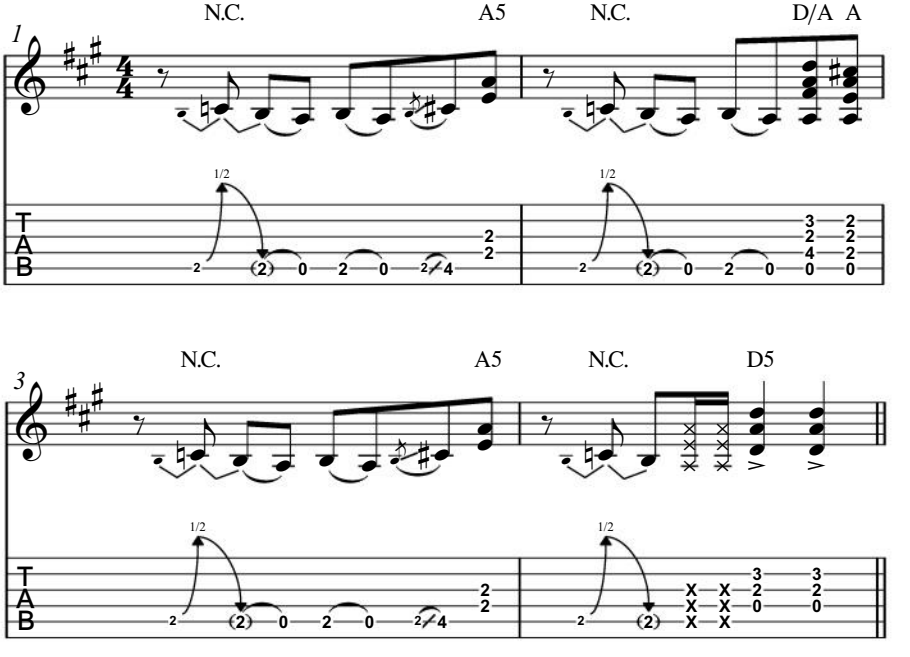
Ex. 7



Ex. 8



Ex. 9



Folks… Inspired by the song's intro, **Ex. 9** is a hummable riff created by a mix of single notes and chords. Notice how the muted strums in the final bar add some rhythmic spice. **Ex. 10** is influenced by the acoustic guitar interlude in this track and is composed of a series of triads that create another irresistible melodic line. In this way, Walsh's songs almost always have numerous instrumental hooks, courtesy of his catchy guitar riffs.

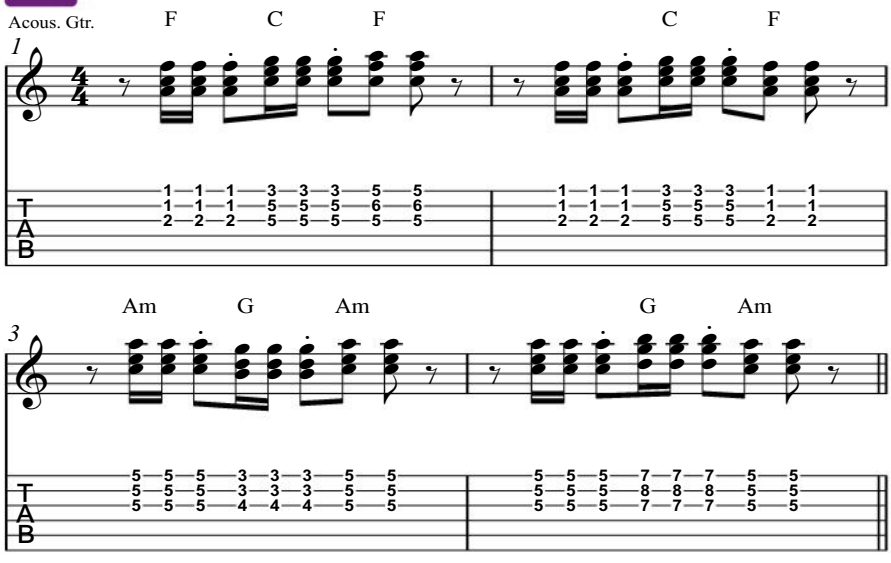
Joe will sometimes take a simple rhythm guitar idea but play it in a way that's rhythmically skewed, often using *syncopation* — accentuating the weak part of a beat, also known as the "and" or "upbeat." **Ex. 11** is reminiscent of "I Can Play That Rock & Roll," from his humorously titled 1983 solo album, *You Bought It — You Name It*. Note how the use of space, offset by chordal stabs on the upbeats, keeps us on our toes. Listen to the riff a few times, until you're able to sing it. It will definitely help make for a quicker transition to your guitar.

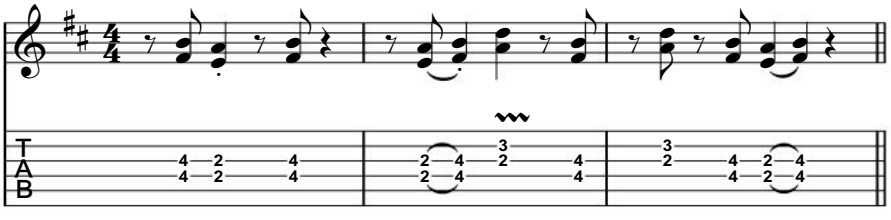
Let's close out this lesson with a look at Walsh's guitar work in "Turn to Stone," from his first official solo record, *So What*, released in 1974, one year before he joined the Eagles. **Ex. 12** is not unlike one of his solos, a plaintive cry that acts as a foil to the soothing Crosby, Stills & Nash–like vocal harmonies that precede it. As before, let the releases fall away without going for any specific rhythm. They should be free and easy, and, like Walsh, you should have some fun, too.

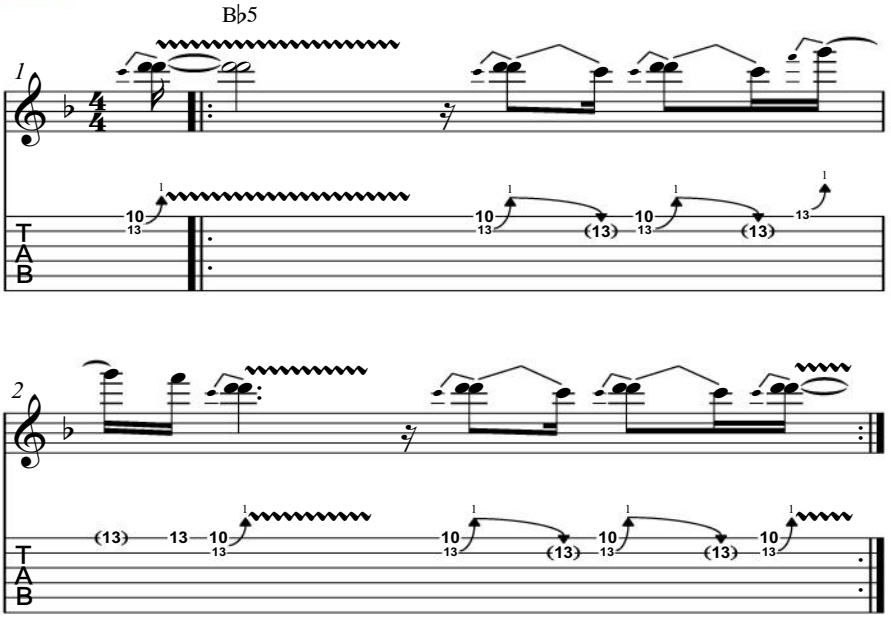
With his guitar, Joe Walsh conveys to the world his offbeat personality and wry sense of humor, with surprising directness. He accomplishes this by, among other things, finding the magic that can be created by focusing on not only what notes you play but also how you play them. This is one of the vast musical spaces where one's own unique voice as a guitarist can be discovered and claimed.

Jeff Jacobson is a guitarist, songwriter and veteran music transcriber, with hundreds of published credits. For information on virtual guitar and songwriting lessons or custom transcriptions, reach out to Jeff on Twitter @jjmusicmentor or visit jeffjacobson.net.

Ex. 10



Ex. 11

Ex. 12



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Compact Reamper

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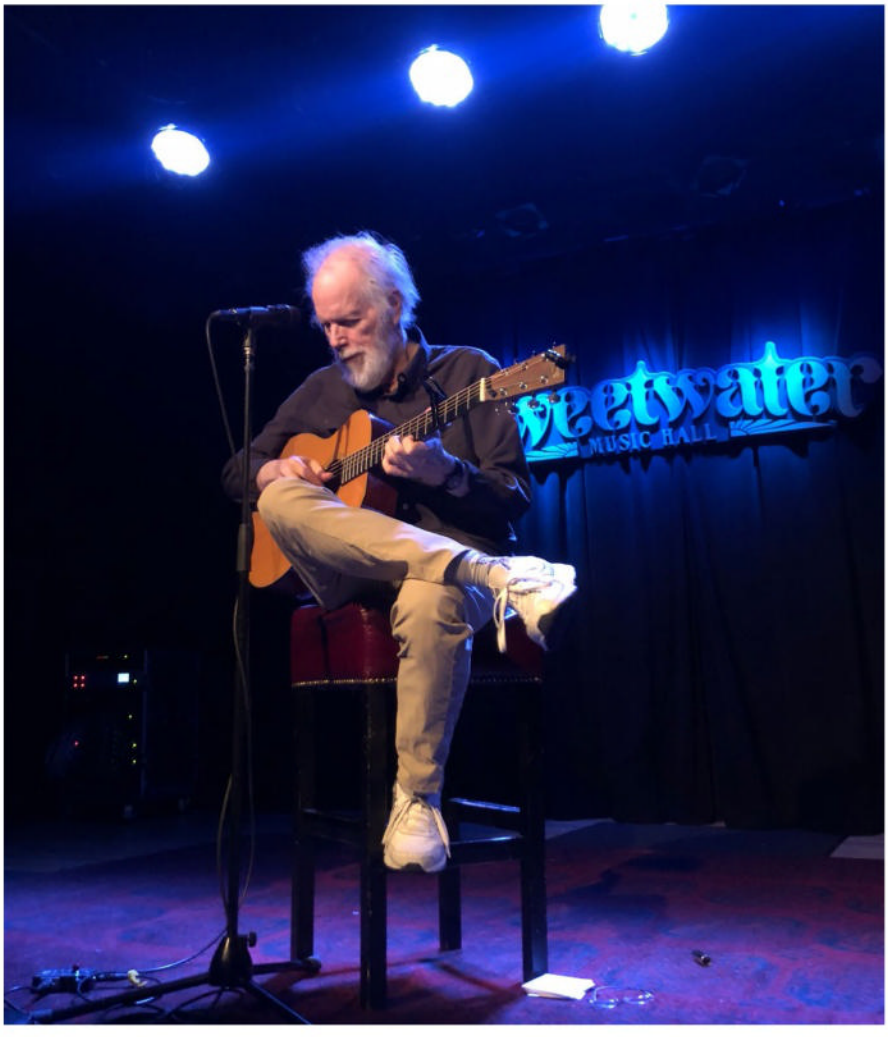
Sound Check With Leo

Acoustic icon Leo Kottke offers insights as he finds his sound at Sweetwater Music Hall.

BY JIMMY LESLIE



LEO KOTTKE IS one of the most road-savvy troubadours of all time, and Bob Weir's Sweetwater Music Hall in Mill Valley, California, is a top-shelf venue, so sound check for such a well-honed solo act should take about five minutes, right? Wrong. After I interviewed Kottke for an extensive Frets feature that ran in the December and Holiday 2020 issues, he graciously extended an invitation to drop in for his show on February 14. I happened to arrive as he was going through a bit of an ordeal to achieve sonic satisfaction.

GOING SINGLE ON VALENTINE'S DAY

Kottke was sitting in a seat in the fourth row scrutinizing his tone coming over the main house speakers. Surprisingly, he was traveling with one instrument. Even more surprising, it was not his signature Taylor 12-string but rather a six-string Martin 00. The 77-year-old's brief explanation was simply that playing a smaller, lighter instrument was easier to manage, and that "I don't have any serious back problems yet, and I'd like to keep it that way."

PICKUP LINES

Kottke felt that his active magnetic sound hole pickup wasn't providing the right kind of low end. "110 to 120 cycles is frequently a little humpy on magnets, and the low bottom below 60 cycles or so should not be sneezed at," he remarked. He asked engineer "Chaby" Xavier Merano to mute the signal and said, "I'm going to try the passive version." As he reached into a little black accessory bag, Kottke explained that he didn't have the Sunrise sound hole pickup he's famous for using on hand and instead was trying out a couple of Fishman Rare Earth models. The passive pickup's low end pleased Kottke, but he was now unhappy with the high end. He made another switch. When consulted, I felt the third option sounded best across the entire frequency spectrum. "Unfortunately, we agree," he quipped. Then he explained that it was an under-the-bridge trio of K&K Pure Mini piezo transducers, and although he's not a big fan of transducers, he was open to the best choice in the moment. (Kottke sent a note after the gig saying he's back with the Sunrise: "It's the only thing that gives me the goddamn note.")

ADDRESS SLIDE TONES DIFFERENTLY

The next challenge was getting a good slide tone, and he didn't have a signature Latch Lake Acousta-Glide Slide on hand either. He explained that his old stalwart had been stolen, and it was made back in the day from a very particular brass alloy that was eventually banned for containing lead. "Brass can sound kind of dull, but as it turns out, lead can actually make it sound better. It acts almost like rosin on a bow. You want a bit of it, but not too much."

Kottke had a few glass slides of various thicknesses, and a thin brass slide. He started auditioning the glass ones, and the grimace on his face reflected the rather harsh tones happening in the speakers. Kottke acknowledged that magnetic pickups generally deliver smoother slide sounds, and since he was now using a piezo transducer, the glass sounded a bit brash. As he slipped the brass on his pinkie, he said, "I don't usually use such a thin slide, but it's worth a try."

JIMMY LESLIE

It was more pleasing to my ears, and he said again, "Unfortunately, we agree."

The tone was still quite bright, so he turned down the treble control on a Red-Eye preamp made by Fire-Eye Development. He'd found a satisfactory slide tone, but having the treble at unity was clearly better for everything else, so the plan was to dial it back only for slide-oriented tunes.

"The Red-Eye helps greatly with body resonance at 400 cycles — the sound of the roof of the mouth — and it is good for the over-the-top bottom you'll get on K&Ks," Kottke says. "Over-the-top as in sound asleep in Oslo when they start dynamiting a new subway tunnel under your hotel at 6 a.m."

MONITOR THE SITUATION

Kottke took to a chair to check the sound onstage and was unhappy again. He proclaimed, "I'm in a bass trap up here." The house engineer was essentially helpless because Kottke was listening to the mains. "I don't use monitors," Kottke explained. "I want to hear the sound in the room, and monitors scare me to death." Kottke moved forward to the lip and was slightly happier, but not fully. We thought the higher perspective from a barstool might help, and sure enough, it did. "I feel like a marionette sitting on this thing," Kottke joked, but as uncomfortable as he was physically, he was finally comfortable sonically.

"BRASS CAN SOUND KIND OF DULL, LEAD CAN MAKE IT SOUND BETTER"

We can learn many things from watching a situation like this one unfold. The bottom line is to always use your ears first. Consult other ears if it helps. In addition, be flexible. A particular product endorsement, or what worked last night or last year doesn't matter — focus on getting the sound right that night in that room. And finally, remember that no one is above the fray or beyond the reach of sonic gremlins, and no one has paid all their dues until they've played their final notes. The quest for tone and the compromises one must make for playability are endless and ever changing. Adaptability is the key to survival, always and for everyone, even one of the best to ever pick up an acoustic.

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player*– and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.*

GIBSON

Les Paul Traditional Pro V

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

AMERICAN GUITAR MAKERS' collaborations with major retailers have occasionally resulted in some gems with staying power beyond their original "exclusive-to" intentions. The Gibson USA Les Paul Traditional Pro V is just such a guitar. Offered exclusively for several years by Gibson and Guitar Center, it has been updated for 2023 with two sumptuous new finishes: Transparent Ebony Burst over a flame-maple top (as reviewed here), and a satin Desert Burst on a plain maple top. Otherwise, it retains the raft of hot-rod features that make it a superbly versatile performer, Outwardly, it appears to be a dead-standard Les Paul, and given guitarists' famously traditional leanings, that's clearly the idea. But scratch the surface and just about every component hides a notable modification that takes this modern 'Burst's capabilities way beyond the ordinary.

Construction follows the traditional Les Paul template, featuring a solid mahogany body capped with a carved flame-maple top, a glued-in mahogany neck, and a bound 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, all to a 24.75-inch scale length. But even these basic specs hide several unseen alterations. The fingerboard sports a compound radius that flattens out gradually as you progress toward the body, and the neck back is carved to an asymmetrical update of the traditional SlimTaper neck profile, resulting in slightly more depth front-to-back at the bass side of the carve and helping it fit the curve of the hand a little better.

Finally, the body has been weight relieved with nine large, round holes drilled into the mahogany before the top is glued on. Even so, it leans a tad on the heavy side at a shade under 10 pounds, although we'd have considered this a light one back in the '70s or '80s, so I guess it's all a matter of perspective.

Close examination reveals that Gibson USA's construction is generally excellent. There's just a tiny bit of ledge where the top binding meets the body and some barely perceptible orange peel at the back of the neck heel, where the nitro has rippled in the wood grain, but the finish is well shot otherwise and particularly stunning where the Transparent Ebony Burst reveals some beautifully figured maple in the guitar's top. For another entry in the tasty timber department, the rosewood fretboard on this example is an appealing dark-chocolate brown, with some lovely subtle striping in the grain. As for general ergonomics, the guitar plays smoothly right out of the case, benefiting from a confident setup that delivers easy action and accurate intonation

SPECIFICATIONS

Les Paul Traditional Pro V
CONTACT gibson.com
PRICE $2,399, satin Desert Burst; $3,099 Transparent Ebony Burst

NUT GraphTech NuBone, 1 11/16" wide
NECK Mahogany, asymmetrical SlimTaper profile
FRETBOARD Rosewood, 24.75" scale, compound radius
FRETS 22 modern
TUNERS Grover locking
BODY Weight-relieved mahogany with carved flame-maple top
BRIDGE Nashville Tune-o-matic with aluminum stopbar tailpiece
PICKUPS Two Gibson Tradbuckers
CONTROLS Volume and tone for each pickup, push-pull switching on each plus five DIP switches for split/tapped, out of phase, individual high-pass filter on/off, and transient suppression
FACTORY STRINGS Gibson .010–.046
WEIGHT 9.8 lbs
BUILT USA

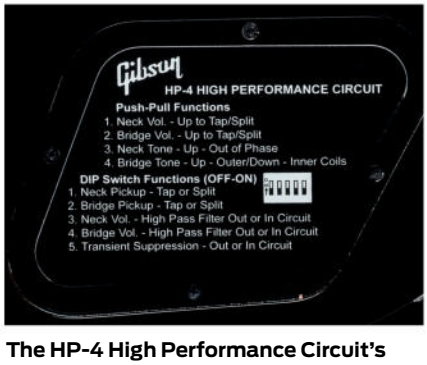
KUDOS A well-built Les Paul in the grand tradition, boasting a plethora of tone-crafting options courtesy of clever switching systems
CONCERNS It leans a little heavy for a weight-relieved instrument

The Transparent Ebony Burst finish reveals the top's beautifully figured maple.

right up the neck. It boasts a lively, resonant ring when played unplugged, too.

Down at the body end, the hardware includes an aluminum stopbar tailpiece behind a Nashville Tune-o-matic bridge. The headstock carries locking Grover tulip-button tuners and a "Trad Pro V" engraved truss-rod cover beneath the inlaid pearl Gibson logo and stenciled "Les Paul Model" signature. I also like the slightly larger strap buttons, compared to the tiny vintage-spec buttons, whose use always puzzled me, given that this is one of the guitars more likely to suffer a headstock break when dropped.

Alongside the modifications to vintage spec, the pickups and electronics are the Les Paul Traditional Pro V's biggest bragging rights. The open zebra-coil humbuckers in this model are Gibson's Tradbuckers, made to the traditional PAF formula, with offset coils that are also a little underwound in the neck position and slightly overwound in the bridge (resistance-wise, that translates to 7.49k ohms and 8.44k ohms, respectively). Each carries an Alnico V bar magnet and has four-conductor wiring to enable a plethora of switching options.



The HP-4 High Performance Circuit's functions are explained on the control access panel.

And switching options there are! Push-pull switches on every volume and tone potentiometer are further enhanced by a block of five DIP switches housed within the control cavity. Comprising Gibson's HP-4 High Performance Circuit, they offer — depending on DIP positions — tap or split of each pickup, out-of-phase (with the neck tone up), and outer coils or inner coils for the split (with the bridge tone up or down), respectively. DIP switches three and four determine whether each pickup's volume control has its high-pass filter engaged (to retain treble when rolled down), while the fifth DIP switch enables a Transient Suppression circuit when on. Developed by *GP* contributor Craig Anderton, this circuit (which is in the public domain) reduces the signal peaks somewhat like a compressor or limiter and is particularly useful when recording direct into digital interfaces to help avoid nasty clipping in the AD conversion.

Tested through a 1966 Fender Princeton and a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, the Les Paul Traditional Pro V revealed a chameleon-like sonic personality couched in a bevy of classic Les Paul tones that easily justify the Traditional part of its name. First and foremost, this is a solid, muscular Les Paul in the grand style: Chunky rhythm, singing lead tones and a beefy yet articulate voice are all front and center, so the Traditional Pro V can easily be aimed at anything you'd have used a more "standard" Standard for in the past. As such, it was a lot of fun just getting lost in the riffing, the way these guitars have always inspired me to do, particularly with a Friedman Smallbox MIAB overdrive into the London rig for some Plexi-like graunch.

Start messing with the switching options and the sky's the limit for tone-crafting. I was pretty good at math back in the day and still don't have time to run the numbers on the sonic options available here, nor space to describe them all. Having played through most major combinations, though, it was easy to hear what a boon this could be to your recording efforts in particular, while a couple of alternatives could certainly benefit live use. For me, however, the plethora of variables also presented a potential downside when I wanted to just keep playing and not have to wonder, But what if I popped out this knob and flicked this DIP switch? But that's a "me" problem, as they say.

All in all, Gibson's latest Les Paul Traditional Pro V is a solid performer in the dual-humbucker, single-cutaway set-neck tradition and a very flexible tone crafter. And undoubtedly, that's sure to excite a lot of eager players.

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

PRS

Sonzera 20 Combo

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

AN AMERICAN-VOICED AMP with a Portuguese name, the Sonzera 20 was recently re-released by PRS, and on paper at least it does appear to fill a crucial space in this Maryland-based maker's lineup. The 20-watt, black-panel, 1x12 reverb combo has been a seminal template ever since Fender's legendary Deluxe Reverb hit the scene in 1963. Add a foot-switchable gain (lead) channel, effects loop, and external bias adjustment facilities to the feature set, and if it lives up to its name in the tone department — *sonzera* being slang for *cool sound* — it's almost certain to be a winner at this price.

Even though the 2023 Sonzera 20 comes in at approximately $200 more than the original 2017 release, the sub-$1,000 price tag appears extremely reasonable, from a quick assessment. It looks to be even more of a bargain when you learn that PRS amp designer Doug Sewell has not only refined the amp's voicing but has also redesigned the printed circuit board (PCB) for lower noise and improved durability, upgraded component specifications, and made the cabinet build more rugged, along with overhauling the combo's look. Regarding the styling, I feel the black Tolex with silver grille and piping is a winner, and the 19-by-18-by-10.5-inch combo looks sleek, timeless and ready for business.

Despite its American inspiration, the Sonzera 20's control panel is laid out British style, with the signal flowing leftward from a single input at the far right of the fascia. From here, we first approach the Gain channel with its own bright switch, followed by controls for drive, level, treble, mid and bass. A front-panel channel-selector toggle follows, with the Clean channel's volume, treble and bass after, then global reverb and presence. On the back, right to left, are the power and standby switches, loop send and return, output-tube bias checkpoints and adjustment pot, the TRS foot-switch jack (a two-button foot-switch for reverb and channel selection is included), and five speaker outs: one for the onboard 12-inch Celestion V-Type at 16 ohms, two eight-ohm and two four-ohm.

Chinese construction has helped to keep the Sonzera 20's price at this level, but the re-released combo reveals a robust build and sturdy components nonetheless. Inside the chassis this means a PCB and consumer-grade parts, naturally, but I'd say it's on par with most other all-tube amps at this price, and arguably more confidence-inspiring than many. The Sonzera 20 carries four 12AX7 preamp tubes for gain-stage, reverb and phase-inverter duties, along with two 5881s in the output stage (they can be substituted with two short-bottle 6L6GC STRs, if desired). Sewell tells us the larger output tubes enable a big-amp voice in a lower-output package and are easily regulated by voltage levels and careful transformer design

to operate in something of a "permanently power-scaled" state. Used in this way, the bigger output tubes are also likely to enjoy an extended lifespan, which should help reduce maintenance issues.

I tested the Sonzera 20 with a Fender 1954 Telecaster Reissue and a Gibson SG Standard with humbuckers, and quickly discovered an amp that more than lives up to the value that its specs-to-price ratio implies. Sewell points out that the Sonzera 20's standby control is really an input-mute, so the usual "amp on" background noise will be heard even with that switch still off, but in fully operational mode the noise level is reasonable, even with the Tele's single-coils.

With either guitar, the Clean channel offered impressive headroom throughout its range, delivering classic snappy, tight and articulate tones in a broad, balanced voice entirely redolent of the '60s American classics. While players also loved the original's ability to be set at the edge of breakup for semi-clean tones that are still dynamic and singing, the Sonzera 20 avoids tipping into clipping all the way up the dial, and maybe just edges toward it at top whack with the SG's humbuckers applied. But that's just what we call a pedal platform these days, and as per its design intentions this channel interacts beautifully with a range of overdrive pedals — including the Wampler Tumnus Deluxe, Origin M-EQ Driver and a Victory The Duchess that I tried with it — to enable a "third channel" of sorts, achieving the pushed-cleans and crunch tones that the amp itself lacks.

The Gain channel can be dialed down for edge-of-breakup clean-ish tones too, but then you would miss out on the delightfully thick, rich, singing lead voicings available here, which I found to be some of the most fun tone zones in the entire amp. American leaning, but with a nod toward British stack territory, this channel proved a gutsy rock warrior with surprisingly versatile capabilities, and it was one of the biggest surprises of this new Sonzera 20.

THE SONZERA 20 MORE THAN LIVES UP TO THE VALUE THAT ITS SPECS-TO-PRICE RATIO IMPLIES

Both the Clean channel's volume and the Gain channel's level control can trick you into thinking there isn't a whole lot of volume available here, given the gradual increase from silent to the high-noon position. From there, though, things just keep getting proportionally louder on both channels, rather than merely folding into clipping as on many vintage amps, so it's really more a matter of adjusting your expectations to an evenly tapered potentiometer. The tube-driven spring reverb is impressive on all fronts: It doesn't wash out the clarity and attack of your picking, even when maxed out, and it's a lush and richly atmospheric effect by any measure.

All in all, this is a versatile and great-sounding amp by any standard, and it's all the more impressive at this price. Given all of the above, the Sonzera 20 earns an Editors' Pick Award for its achievements.

SPECIFICATIONS

Sonzera 20 Combo
CONTACT prsguitars.com
PRICE $999 street

CHANNELS 2
CONTROLS Gain: drive, level, treble, mid, bass, bright switch. Clean: volume, treble, bass. Global: reverb and presence
POWER 20 watts
TUBES Four 12AX7 preamp tubes, two 5881/6L6 output tubes
SPEAKER 70-watt 12-inch Celestion V-Type
EXTRAS Two-button foot-switch for reverb and channel select. FX loop, bias check and adjustment points. Five speaker outs for 4Ω to 16Ω cabs
WEIGHT 42 lbs
BUILT China

KUDOS A great-sounding amp at the price. Boasts a cleverly conceived feature set
CONCERNS Clean channel requires an overdrive pedal to push it into breakup, and the tapers of the volume and level controls might take some getting used to

TAYLOR

American Dream Grand Theater AD11E-SB

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

TAYLOR INTRODUCED THE no-frills American Dream Series during the summer of 2020, at the height of the pandemic, in order to fulfill increasing demand from the multitudes dreaming of an American-made acoustic at an attainable price. Around the same time, the innovative manufacturer also introduced the Grand Theater body style, which is a bit larger than its travel-sized GS Mini and slightly smaller than a Grand Concert. Now the two concepts come together in the AD11e-SB. The guitar is one of three eye-catching Sunburst additions to the American Dream Series, designated by "SB" in the model title: the Grand Theater AD11e-SB, the slightly larger Grand Concert AD12e-SB, and the soft-shouldered dreadnought Grand Pacific AD17e-SB. All three feature a Tobacco Sunburst finish on a solid Sitka spruce top, with solid walnut back and sides.

The aesthetic is modern vintage, and the hand-painted Tobacco Sunburst top finish is the star attraction. Indoors, it has a dusky quality. Outside, in sunshine, hints of cherry become apparent in the tan outer burst while the inner honey hues become more golden. Sunlight also brings out all the nuances in the firestripe faux tortoiseshell pickguard. There are some cool green tones and sparkles mixed in near the fretboard side that bring some of the same intrigue as staring into the embers of a campfire. Old-fashioned Italian acrylic dot inlays adorn a eucalyptus fretboard, adding to the rootsy vibe.

Taylor's diminutive Grand Theater is actually a scaled-down version of its largest body style, the Grand Orchestra, and it appears quite voluptuous. All Grand Theaters feature Taylor's new C-Class bracing system, a modified version of V-Class designed to deliver substantial tones from small bodies, although the AD11e-SB is more of a jangler than a boomer. The low end is respectable for its size but not in the same league as its far fancier cousins — the rosewood-and-spruce 811e and all-koa K21e — that we reviewed exactly two years ago. Taylor says the sound of walnut back and sides is akin to mahogany. The AD11e-SB has a midrange focus with a crisp sparkle and a dry finish. Volume is on the soft side, yet the tone is vivacious, clear, straightforward and fundamental. Light fingerpicking or plucking is rewarded with nuanced response and sweet sustain. Attack too aggressively with the action set as low as this one is, and those qualities become lost in fret splat, so play softly and let it sing. Plugged into an AER Compact 60, the amplified sound represented the acoustic tone well, and I took the opportunity to boost the bass a bit via the onboard ES2 preamp.

THE HAND-PAINTED TOBACCO SUNBURST TOP FINISH IS THE STAR ATTRACTION

The Grand Theater is designed for a relaxed feel, and that's a huge part of the appeal. Playability is super easy, and playing in open position actually feels a lot like having a capo at the first fret. Bending notes and playing barre chords are practically effortless thanks to the short, 24 1/8–inch scale length and slim neck measuring 1.72 inches wide at the nut. I'd highly recommend the AD11e for students and to any player requiring extra-easy playability, such as those with repetitive stress injuries to arms and hands. Here's a neat trick: if the GT's feel is a bit too relaxed and you'd like a bit more fight without turning the truss rod, simply tune the whole guitar up a half step for a snappier string response.

As Taylor's Grand Theater lineup grows, options abound. For those with budgets under two grand, the AD11e-SB is attractive, with quality craftsmanship in the same price range as the all-mahogany version, the Blacktop (with walnut back and sides and a black top) and the original Urban Ash offering. Those with larger budgets seeking the biggest tone from a small instrument should check out the beefier-sounding and more refined 811e, and the affluent will appreciate the all-koa K21e. Those interested in a lighter, open tone with a more organic vibe at an attainable price should audition the AD11e-SB. For a similar style in a larger instrument, check out its new siblings in the American Dream Series, the Grand Concert AD12e-SB and Grand Pacific AD17e-SB.

SPECIFICATIONS

American Dream Grand Theater AD11e-SB
CONTACT taylorguitars.com
PRICE $1,799 street, AeroCase included

NUT WIDTH 1.72", black Tusq
NECK Tropical mahogany
FRETBOARD Eucalyptus, 24 1/8" scale, Italian acrylic faux pearl dot inlays
FRETS 20
TUNERS Taylor satin black
BODY Solid walnut back and sides, solid Sitka spruce top with C-Class bracing
BRIDGE Eucalyptus with Micarta saddle
ELECTRONICS Taylor ES2 with volume, bass, and treble controls
FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario XS coated phosphor bronze light .012–.053
WEIGHT 3.7 lbs (as tested)
BUILT USA

KUDOS Attractive modern/vintage look. Quality craftsmanship at an affordable price. Small and lightweight body, with organic vibe, relaxed feel and easy playability
CONCERNS Tone is on the light side

DONNER

DJP-1000

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

WITH ITS CLASSIC double-cutaway shape and semi-hollow construction, the DJP-1000 represents Donner's take on one of the most successful electric guitars that Gibson launched in the late 1950s under president Ted McCarty. The DJP-1000 stays essentially true to form by featuring a body made from laminated maple with a solid-maple center block and a glued-in neck carved from maple instead of mahogany. It carries two humbucking pickups under nickel-plated covers, along with the standard configuration of two volume and two tone controls, and a three-way toggle switch for pickup selection. To increase flexibility, both volumes have push-pull coil-split switches.

The DJP-1000 is a great looking guitar with its gloss-red finish (it's also available in gloss black and sunburst) and a preponderance of white binding, which is all carefully done, revealing no slop in the miter joints, color bleed or unevenness in height where the binding meets the wood. The multi-ply trim on the headstock face is flawless and the trapezoid inlays on the fingerboard are cleanly set without excess filler. Very nice.

Hardware consists of a Tune-o-matic–style bridge and stop tailpiece, and the headstock sports chrome-die-cast tuners with Grover-style half-round buttons. The guitar was set up with very low action and tuneful intonation. I only needed to loosen the truss rod and raise the bridge a bit to eliminate some buzzing above the 10th position. The frets are nicely shaped and given a light polish, and their ends are smoothly beveled. The nut is also evenly set and has no sharp corners.

The DJP's sound is bright and fairly loud when strummed acoustically, and it sustains like a solid guitar thanks to the maple center block. Plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Boss Katana-50 MkII for higher-gain tones, the DJP-1000 delivered a good range of sounds. The pickups have a balanced response and plenty of output, and my only slight issue is that they lack some of the juicy complexity and responsiveness to playing dynamics offered by the pickups on a Gibson Historic ES-335 used for comparison. Considering the price difference, however,

SPECIFICATIONS

DJP-1000
CONTACT donnermusic.com
PRICE $379 street, gig bag included

NUT Synthetic bone, 1 11/16" wide
NECK Maple, rounded C shape
FRETBOARD Rosewood, 24 3/4" scale
FRETS 22 medium jumbo
TUNERS Die-cast, chrome
BODY Laminated maple back and sides, laminated-maple top
BRIDGE Tune-o-matic-style with stop tailpiece
PICKUPS Donner humbuckers with nickel covers
CONTROLS Volume and tone for each pickup, push-pull switching on volume pots for coil-split (outside coils), 3-way toggle
FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario .010–.046
WEIGHT 7.86 lbs (as tested)
BUILT China

KUDOS A classic-looking guitar that's well made, fun to play and affordable
CONCERNS None

the DJP deserves kudos for offering clear neck-position sounds that are cool for blues and jazz, and bright bridge-pickup tones that rocked hard when fueled up with a Fulltone OCD or a TWA SH9 overdrive pedal. (I'd usually leave them on when using the Fender amp, and ride the guitar's volumes to get dirtier or cleaner tones.) They sounded especially great running in split-coil mode to make up for a drop in output when riffing on those crisp, funky sounds.

THE DJP-1000 IS A BANG-FOR-BUCK CHAMP THAT MAKES A GREAT GO-TO GIG GUITAR

The DJP-1000 has a lot to offer those who seek a less-expensive route to the versatility, sweet look and great-playing feel of this classic semi-hollow. With its good build quality and attention to detail, the DJP-1000 is a bang-for-buck champ that makes a great go-to gig guitar.

TWA

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

SH9 Scott Henderson Signature Distortion

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

AS THE FIRST signature model effect from TWA (Totally Wycked Audio), the SH9 Scott Henderson Signature Distortion is also the company's first ground-up design collaboration with Tube Screamer inventor Susumu Tamura. For the SH9, Tamura took the basic SD-9 Sonic Distortion circuit that he developed in 1981 and reworked it to meet Henderson's performance standards. As the literature explains, "The center frequency of the SH9's tone control has been shifted and focused in the lows and lower mids. The SH9 retains this low-end response even as the tone control is turned up, allowing notes to speak properly in the higher registers on the guitar. This increased note girth, combined with the SH9's inherent compression, allows Scott to effortlessly articulate the fluid, horn-like lead tones that he is known for."

Other improvements are increased output level and the ability to operate on nine- or 18-volt power, the latter providing more headroom, less compression and a slightly different distortion character. The swanky purple paint job signals to fans of the Ibanez and Maxon SD-9s that there's a new sheriff in town, and the SH9 is further differentiated by using a mechanical foot switch and true-bypass circuitry. Removing four screws to peer inside the die-cast housing revealed only the back of the PCB, which is reportedly populated with ALPS potentiometers, Marushin audio jacks and WIMA metal-film caps. There's also a terminal clip for a battery.

Tested with a Gibson Historic '59 Les Paul and a G&L ASAT Classic with Seymour Duncan pickups — both through a reissue '65 Fender Deluxe Reverb with circuitry by George Alessandro — the SH9 made its case right off the bat in three ways: its thickness, how much distortion it delivers and the amount of output on tap. With single-coils, it poured out smoothly textured grind when I set the distortion knob to one o'clock, the tone to nine o'clock or less, and the level to around two o'clock. This worked well for lead and dirty rhythm by simply riding the guitar volume. From there it was easy to dial in a Les Paul to deliver a singing neck-pickup tone that was great for blues, or a fat, sustaining bridge-pickup sound with nicely voiced highs that let it slice through when things got loud. The pedal's compression makes for a great feel when soloing, and even with the distortion up past two o' clock, rolling back the guitar volume produced a ballsy rhythm tone that was killer for crunch riffing.

The thick, muscular drive that the SH9 dishes out makes it a sweet deal for anyone who's ever wished for a "more" knob on the Ibanez SD-9. If that sounds like you, then you will likely appreciate the cooperative efforts by TWA's Kevin Bolembach, Susumu Tamura and Scott Henderson to create this hot-rodded version of one of the coolest OD pedals ever.

The SH9 is offered with and without Henderson's signature.

SPECIFICATIONS

SH9 Scott Henderson Signature Distortion
CONTACT godlyke.com.
PRICE $300

CONTROLS Distortion, tone, level
I/O Input, output, 9VDC jack (adapter not included)
FOOT SWITCH Mechanical, true-bypass switching
EXTRAS Can operate on battery power
BUILT USA

KUDOS Thick distortion with smoothly tailored highs. Great playing feel and lots of gain and output
CONCERNS None

Tube Screamer inventor Susumu Tamura teamed up with Scott Henderson (shown onscreen) to create the SH9.

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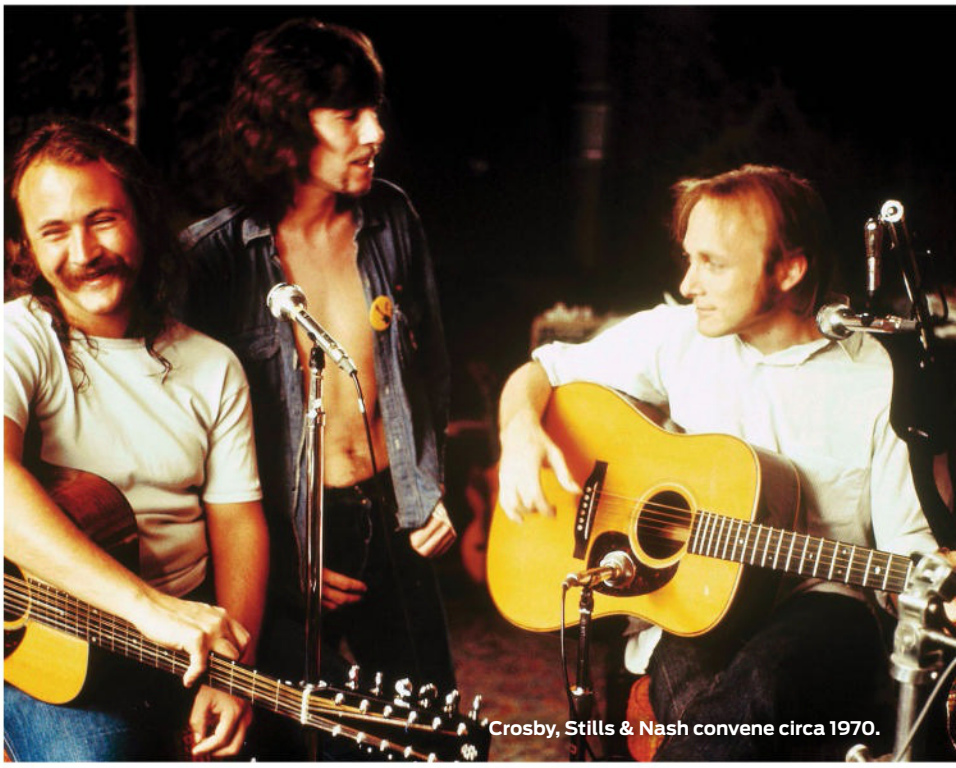
FOR MORE OF OUR DAVID CROSBY INTERVIEW, SEE PAGE 24

How I Wrote...

"Wooden Ships"

David Crosby reveals how he, Stephen Stills and Paul Kantner wrote a visionary classic.

BY JOE BOSSO



Crosby, Stills & Nash convene circa 1970.

"IT'S AN APOCALYPTIC vision of the world crumbling into pieces," David Crosby told *Guitar Player* of "Wooden Ships," the sometimes moody, often turbulent anti-war rocker that appeared on Crosby, Stills & Nash's self-titled debut album in 1969. Although written at the height of the Vietnam War, it has become one of the late guitarist's most enduring numbers. And in his last interview with us, in November 2022, he noted with irony and dismay that "everything in the song feels like it's coming true today. How weird is that?"

THREE GUITARISTS WALK ONTO A BOAT...

Oddly, the visions of doomsday foretold in "Wooden Ships" ("Horror grips us as we watch you die/ all we can do is echo your anguished cries") were written on the water during an idyllic period in Crosby's life. He'd just bought a boat, *Mayan*, and docked it in Fort Lauderdale. To christen the vessel, he invited his new bandmate Stephen Stills and Jefferson Airplane's Paul Kantner for a fun and peaceful hang. "Stephen and I had just started CSN with Graham [*Nash*]," Crosby recalled. "We weren't intentionally writing material for what became our first record. But that's what happened."

The three musicians had acoustic guitars on hand — Crosby brought his Martin D-18, which had been converted to a 12-string — and spent a good chunk of time merrily strumming away in the boat's cabin. "I already had some pieces of a song, and before you knew it, we took what I had and blew it up into 'Wooden Ships,'" Crosby says. "It was a significant moment for me, because I realized, Wow, you don't have to write this shit all by yourself; you can collaborate with other people. I found out that I really liked it."

Crosby says the bulk of the song's chord changes and the melodies are his. "Stephen added some chords, and he wrote words to the second verse," he recalls. "A lot of the stuff at the front was Kantner — it sounds like him. The guitar intro was Stills. It's a good mixture of talents. I don't work with chumps."

One thing that Crosby neglected to bring aboard was any kind of tape recorder. "I wouldn't have needed it anyway," he cavalierly attests. "The song was so fucking good, there's no way I'd forget it."

STEPHEN STILLS: MVP

A few months later, Crosby, Stills & Nash convened at Wally Heider Studios in Hollywood to cut their debut record. "We liked working at Wally's," Crosby says. "What you played was what came back to you." To record "Wooden Ships," he played an electric 12-string that Alembic had built for him. "That's probably the best guitar I ever had. I'm pretty sure I put it through a Fender Twin. I got a great sound."

Recording the basics with drummer Dallas Taylor went smoothly. Crosby believes they had a keeper in two or three takes. "We had fun with it. Things were new and we were excited," he says. "Those hard guitar chords in the beginning, that's me. Stephen played bass and lead guitar."

"Wooden Ships" contains multiple examples of Stills' bravura soloing. One minute, he's firing off bracing rock, the next he's in a mellow jazz-like mode. "His playing is breathtaking," Crosby marvels. "He didn't plan anything out because he didn't have to. The guy's good, man. He took a few whacks at it, and we picked the best one."

THE SONG DOESN'T REMAIN THE SAME

Because of a messy contract dispute, Paul Kantner's name didn't appear as a co-writer of "Wooden Ships" on the original May 1969 release of *Crosby, Stills & Nash*. When the matter was resolved, the Airplane recorded their own chilled-out version of the song and included it on their album *Volunteers*.

In another strange twist, the 1969 Woodstock festival saw both bands — Crosby, Stills & Nash, joined by Neil Young, and the Jefferson Airplane — perform the song during their sets. "I thought it was cool for the fans because they got two very different visions of the song," he enthuses. "At the end of the day, the song is really good. It's got lots of imagination and flavor. I think that's why it's lasted."

"IT'S A GOOD MIXTURE OF TALENTS. I DON'T WORK WITH CHUMPS"

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